The Agony of A Dictatorship

Oleg Konstantinovich Ignat'ev
Genrikh Aviezerovich Borovik

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7 **MEMO TO THE READER**

The Storm of Tiscapa

9 CHAPTER ONE • **OPERATION CARLOS FONSECA AMADOR: DEATH TO SOMOZAISM!**

20 CHAPTER TWO • **SANDINO VS. US INTERVENTION**

28 CHAPTER THREE • **THE SOMOZA DYNASTY, THE USA, AND THE NATIONAL GUARD**

38 CHAPTER FOUR • **SANDINISTA REVIVAL**

50 CHAPTER FIVE • **TWO INTERVIEWS**

60 CHAPTER SIX • **THE SEPTEMBER 1978 UPRISING**

76 CHAPTER SEVEN • **WHO WANTS TO KEEP SOMOZA GOING, AND HOW**

88 CHAPTER EIGHT • **TILL VICTORY!**

94 CHAPTER NINE • **GIRDING FOR THE SECOND OFFENSIVE**

108 CHAPTER TEN • **THE SECOND UPRISING**

Sandinista Camp Glimpses

123 **“THEY’RE KILLING PEOPLE THERE”**

131 **A SMALL LAND’S GREAT DREAMS**

142 **“WE’RE ONLY BEGINNING”**

149 **“WE’RE STRONGER!”**

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MEMO TO THE READER

p On 24 August 1978, *Pravda* carried the following new item about Nicaragua: "On Tuesday some twenty Sandinista National Liberation Front guerrillas carried out a daring raid to draw world public attention to the crimes of the murderous Somoza dictatorship. They disarmed the guards and occupied, in downtown Managua, the Nicaragua capital, the building of the National Palace which houses the offices of the National Congress and several ministries. . .."

p As you may remember the raid was a smashing success. Shortly afterwards a popular uprising erupted, in which the patriotic forces came to grips with Somoza's punitive National Guard; however they were outnumbered and the dictator managed to stay in the saddle.

p The two of us visited Central America in late 1978 and early 1979, that is some six months before the downfall of the Somoza regime. We interviewed many Nicaraguans there and assembled a wealth of background material. One of us was even able to visit a Sandinista hideout.

p The book in your hands will tell you what was happening in Nicaragua as 1978 drew to a close, about Somoza, his regime and its backers, and also about the Sandinistas and opposition aims and purposes. Actually you have here two books for the price of one, the first, *The Storm of Tiscapa* by Oleg Ignatiev, presents a panoramic picture of events plus an analysis of the situation, the second *Sandinista Camp Glimpses*, is Genrykh Borovik's account of his visit to a Sandinista hideout.

p *The Authors*

Oleg IGNATIEV

The Storm of Tiscapa

CHAPTER ONE
OPERATION CARLOS FONSECA AMADOR:
DEATH TO SOMOZAISM!

p **Oleg IGNATIEV**

10 11

p “Somoza is a sonofabitch, but he’s ours "

p *Franklin Delano Roosevelt*

p “Foreign News.
“General Sandmo, for several years head of the anti-governmental rebel movement, has been killed in Nicaragua.”

p *Pravda*, 24 February 1934

p The Sandinista raid of 22 August 1978 has no likely precedent in guerilla warfare. A tiny force of 25 men captured in downtown Managua a building where at the time were more than 2,000 civil servants, parliamentarians, armed guards, and visitors, and held them hostage for more than two days before the dictator complied with their demands and they left the country in triumph.

Particulars of the raid and information about the brave men who undertook it have been reported in periodicals around the world. After interviewing some of the people directly involved, and excerpting from notes they jotted downright on the heels of the event, I was able to log the entire affair. Here, now, is the record.

12

***Tuesday, 22 August 1978*,**

p Republic Square in Managua, capital of Nicaragua. Fronting on it is a two-storey massive building occupying a whole block, with ten pompous columns—five on each side of the main entrance. This is the National Palace; it houses the National Congress, with Senate downstairs and the Chamber of Deputies upstairs. On the ground floor is also the Central National Tax Office, while the upstairs eastern wing is occupied by the Ministry of the Interior and the western wing by the Ministry of Finance.

p The lower house is to discuss this day the national budget. The session, in the upstairs Blue Hall, began at 11:50 a.m.

p *12:20*. Two light-green trucks outwardly very much like the vehicles Somoza's "National Guardsmen" used roar up simultaneously to eastern and western side entrances. Outside the eastern entrance a dozen people jump out, among them a woman, clad in National Guard uniforms. Their leader, Comandante Cero, raps out to the two policemen posted at the door, "Appartense! Vena e jefe!" (Make way! Here comes the chief!).

p *Comandante Uno comments*: "We worried whether we would reach the Palace, as Managua was then constantly patrolled by roving 'special anti-terrorist squads', which we call by the acronym of BEGAT for Brigadas Especiales Contra Actividades Terroristas. These squads often stopped cars, buses, and trucks to check freights and papers. However, our two vehicles managed to get through."

p *12:25*. The building is fully in the hands of the guerillas. In five minutes, all guards and police are disarmed. Three officers and one National Guardsman are killed. Of the attacking force, only one person is slightly wounded.

p *Comandante Uno comments*: "The guards thought Somoza had arrived, as in such cases his bodyguards usually shouted, 'Make way! Here comes the chief!'. We caught them napping. Once inside we immediately blocked all three entrances with the massive chains we had prudently taken along. Comandante Cero shouldered the main mission of capturing the Blue Hall where the deputies were in session. With four 13 comrades, I was to occupy the Ministry of the Interior. In the Minister's private office, in the furthermost corridor of the eastern wing, we seized Jose Antonio Mora, the Minister of the Interior himself. Comandante Dos took hostage five Deputies who happened to be in the bar."

p *12:35*. Several minutes later, somebody in town knowing the number of the telephone on the chairperson's desk, phones having heard about the gunfire. Comandante Cero picks up the telephone and says, "National Congress, free territory of Nicaragua".

p *Comandante Uno comments*: "In the Blue Hall there is a direct telephone link with Somoza's private residence. It is also on the chairperson's desk, behind which was Somoza's cousin Luis Pallais Debayle, when our comrades burst into the Blue Hall."

p *12:37*. A National Guard patrol, commanded by a captain, fires at guerillas at the entrance to the Blue Hall. Comandante Cero tosses a hand grenade at the patrol. The captain is killed, the soldiers throw down their guns, and gunfire ceases.

p *12:40*. Radio Managua reports mysterious events in the National Palace, near which heavy gunfire is heard.

p *13.10*. One of the 18 newsmen in the building, a Radio Managua reporter, telephones his office that the National Palace has been seized by Sandinistas, that they have taken deputies hostage and are demanding the release of political prisoners and a $10,000,000 ransom.

p *13:20*. Dictator Anastasio Somoza orders the National Guard to fire on the Palace. They surround the Palace and shatter semi-basement and ground-floor windows. The guerillas reply with sporadic submachine-gun fire.

p *Comandante Uno comments*: "When we broke into the Palace, we had only five submachine guns, 20 rifles, and some 50 hand grenades. We procured more by disarming the police and National Guardsmen. Then, though many of the deputies were armed, they did not fire a shot, but at once surrendered their pistols."

p *13:30*. Several Nicaraguan radio stations confirm the Palace's capture by a group of 20 or more members of the 14 Sandinista National Liberation Front, wearing the olive-green uniforms. They also report National Guard units sniping at the Palace windows.

p *14:20*. Comandante Cero orders Luis Pallais Debayle to telephone Somoza's Montelimar Hospital-Bunker and tell him that the guerillas want him to order the firing stopped. Otherwise, the Sandinistas will execute hostages, one by one, at twohour intervals, until Somoza decides to negotiate.

p *14:25*. Pallais Debayle is again told to telephone Somoza in his bunker and transmit the guerilla proposal that Managua Archbishop Miguel Obando Bravo, Leon Bishop Manuel Salazar Espinosa and Granada Bishop Leovigildo Lopez Fitoria, in Managua for a church conference, come to the Palace to mediate. Somoza agrees.

p *14:35*. All three mediators arrive. Sporadic shots are still heard near the Palace.

p *14:45*. The guerillas appoint Gomandante Dos their chief negotiator. She hands the clergymen the list of Sandinista demands to the dictator. They are:

p 1. That all radio stations report the latest Sandinista communiques and the 50-page text of the Sandinista National Liberation Front Manifesto, setting out Sandinista aims and tasks and nailing the Somoza dictatorship's criminal anti-popular policies.

p 2. That all political prisoners on the list, transmitted to the mediators, be released. Though it is known that 20 on the list are no longer alive, murdered in Nicaraguan torture chambers, the dictator repeatedly assured relatives that they had been misinformed. Now the dictator could once again be exposed as a liar.

p 3. That all 25 guerillas, all released prisoners, and also the chief hostages seized be allowed to leave Nicaragua unhindered.

p 4. That a $10,000,000 ransom be paid as a contribution to the anti-dictatorship fund.

p The clergymen telephone these demands to Somoza. *21:00*. In his first reply, Somoza asks a 24-hour truce. *23:30*. Archbishop Miguel Obando and Bishop Lopez Fitoria leave the Palace to transmit to Somoza personally the 15 text of the Manifesto and list of

prisoners. Bishop Manuel Salazar stays behind as guarantee that the army will not fire at the Palace.

23:45. With four of his men, Gomandante Gero locks Deputies Luis Pallais, Ralph Moody, and Juan Pallasios in a distant room. If the National Guard attacks the Palace at daybreak, these three hostages will be executed first about which Somoza is notified by telephone.

Wednesday, 23 August

p *00:50*. Obeying guerilla order, several deputies run up the red-and-black FSLN flag in the midst of the meeting chamber.

p *01:45*. The guerillas discover a National Guard intercom and now hear the commands issued to National Guard units surrounding the Palace.

p *02:25*. Archbishop Obando and Bishop Fitoria return. They are accompanied by two more mediators, the Ambassadors of Costa Rica and Panama.

p *04:00*. The mediators leave after negotiations with the guerillas to see Somoza. The guerillas hand over National Guard casualties to Red Gross representatives and also release several pregnant women and children, inside the building since its capture. In the Blue Hall, where most of the deputies and other important hostages are confined, the situation is calm.

p *06.50*. Comandante Cero tells the hostages that according to an intercepted radio message, National Guard units are redeploying. He warns that his men will execute the parliamentarians unless Somoza answers by the guerilla-set deadline of 9 a.m.

p *08:30*. The mediators return and notify the guerillas that negotiations with Somoza are making little headway. They bring another note from him, threatening reprisals, though it clearly shows that Somoza has conceded to some demands. Thus, he writes, "I agree to furnish guarantees that I will not obstruct departure of the guerillas to the country of their choice, provided I first receive its consent to accept them. I also agree to release the prisoners listed, should they be among the prisoners within the jurisdiction of the Nicaraguan 16 authorities. The guerillas and the afore-mentioned prisoners must depart this night, after the release of the hostages held".

p *10:25*. Gomandante Gero announces a last deadline for Somoza, and says that if within three hours there is no reply to the Sandinista demands, they will break off all negotiations. The mediators leave.

p *13:20*. The mediators return. Archbishop Obando says, "We think the main obstacle has been overcome." They bring a third note from Somoza, agreeing to the toughest demand to have all radio stations transmit the Manifesto of the Sandinista National Liberation Front.

p *16:00*. Somoza demands that the guerillas and released prisoners leave the country three hours after the FSLN Manifesto is broadcast. The guerillas refuse and say they will leave Nicaragua in the afternoon of 24 August. Somoza offers a $500,000 ransom. The guerillas agree, but call for the scrupulous implementation of all other demands.

p *Comandante Una comments*: "Well aware of the dictator's perfidy, that he might stoop to any vile deceit, we refused to leave the captured Palace on the night of 23 August. To drive out in the dark to the airport would offer Somoza the opportunity of trying to make away with us on the way, or while enplaning. We also wanted Managuans to see Somoza's ignominy with their own eyes, and to realise that it was not only essential, but also possible to wage a successful fight against the dictatorship."

p *16:30*. Radio stations begin broadcasting the FSLN statement exposing Somoza's crimes, and exhorting Nicaraguans to join in the struggle against the dictatorship. Also broadcast is the list of political prisoners whose release FSLN is demanding.

p *18:00*. Nicaraguan radio stations end the broadcast of Sandinista documents. Political prisoners held in Managua are told to prepare to depart. Prisoners held in inland jails and concentration camps are brought into the capital.

p *18:30*. A Nicaraguan representative contacts General Omar Torrijos, President of Panama, to enquire whether the Panamanian government will send a special plane to bring out the guerillas and the released political prisoners. Torrijos 17 answers in the affirmative. Venezuelan President Carlos Andres Perez decides to send a Hercules G-130 transport to Panama to subsequently take off with the Panamanian plane for Managua.

23:00. Wardeis of Managua's Modelo de Tipitapa Prison tell prisoners to prepare for departure.

Thursday, 24 August

p *06:30*. Sandinista prisoners are brought from the Modelo jail to Los-Mercedes Airport. A little later, another bus arrives, bringing prisoners from other jails and from the Central Police Office.

p *09:30*. The twenty-five Sandinistas, five mediators, and four hostages, namely Luis Pallais Debayle, Jose Somoza Abrego, the dictator's nephew, Jose Antonio Mora, and Deputy Eduardo Ghamorro, leave the National Palace and ride out to the airport through cheering crowds.

p *10:30*. With 58 released prisoners, the 25 Sandinistas, and their hostages on board the Venezuelan Air Force Hercules G-130 transport and Panamanian COPA Airlines Electra plane take off for Panama.

p *13:00*. The two aircraft touch down at Tocuman Airport in Panama, where thousands of Panamanians cheer the intrepid Sandinistas who ask Panama for political asylum.

p Operation Carlos Fonseca Amador is a brilliant success.

p “Zero hour”, hour of retribution, is the title of a poem which Ernesto Cardenal Ghamorro, a leading Nicaraguan poet, has dedicated to the great national hero Augusto Cesar Sandino. In Nicaragua today the leader of the Sandinista guerillas is often called simply Comandante Cero. Other commandeis go by the names of One, Two, Three, and so forth, depending on how many are involved in one or another operation. Whatever the case, only the head of the entire Sandinista force may be named Comandante Cero. His real name is Eden Pastora Gomez. Currently 42, he has devoted half his life to fight the Somoza dictatorship. National guardsmen slew his father when he was only seven. He has had three 18 years of higher education at the Department of Medicine of Guadalajara University in Mexico. A strong-willed, brave commander, he has the knack of quickly sizing up people and situations, and his men follow him wherever he may lead them.

p Who are the other two commanders mentioned, Gomandante Uno and Comandante Dos ?

p On the evening of 27 December 1974, in a mansion in Managua’s aristocratic quarter, a reception is in process for US Ambassador Turner Blair Shelton. Among the dignitaries present were Foreign Minister Alejandro Montiel Arguello, Finance Minister General Gustavo Montiel, Minister of Public Works Armel Gonzales, Nicaragua’s Ambassadors to the USA and the UN, and Managua’s Mayor. Their host, Jose Mari& Castillo Quant, is highly pleased with the way the reception is going. After His Excellency Ambassador Shelton leaves, the other guests [stay for a chat. However, a few minutes later, the doors bang open and the muzzles of submachine guns are thrust through the open ground-floor windows. "All lie down with face to the floor and hands behind your backs!" comes the cry. Bodyguards unholster their guns and dash to the door. There is a burst of submachine-gun fire, two of them are killed and several other people are wounded. Realising that resistance is useless, all present hasten to obey the unknown attackers. Several men wearing red-and-black bandanas—the colours of the Sandinista Naiional Liberation Front—drawn up over jaw and nose enter. This is the Sandinista Juan Jose Quezada Unit commanded by Eduardo Contreras Escobar. Taking hostages away the Sandinistas demand that eighteen brother Sandinista political prisoners be released, and that they all be allowed to leave the country unhindered.

p After more than two days of negotiation Somoza yields. One of the 13 Sandinistas involved in this daring raid is 26–year-old Hugo Torres Jimenez, incidentally, the Comandante Uno in the National Palace raid who is sentenced *in absentia* to 30 years of imprisonment.

p As you may have gathered from previous pages, Comandante Dos was a girl, Dora Maria Tellez. Born in 1956, she 19 spent nearly all her life in the small town of Matagalpa—which, incidentally, is not that small by Nicaraguan standards, as with a population of 45,000 it is one of the country’s five largest cities. Though it has textile mills and several small footwear enterprises, most of its townfolk have one or another

connection with farming, as many work sorting, drying, and packaging coffee on plantations in the vicinity.

p Dora Maria finished school in Matagalpa and then entered the Department of Medicine at the University in Leon. She dreamed of returning home a doctor, to work at one of its hospitals, for instance the Monies Gonzales Clinic. However, at the University she made friends with people who had links with Sandinista underground fighters. She began to take an interest in politics, read political literature and took part in several Sandinista missions. After her third year she decided to drop out of college and join the guerillas. From 1976 she has been with guerillas active in the Cordillera de Pilto Mountains, a two-hour drive from the tiny northern town of Ocotal. Her unit is part of the Northern Front, named after Carlos Fonseca Amador, one of the founding fathers of the Sandinista movement, and in fact is termed the Carlos Fonseca Amador Northern Front in all documents. Comandante Cero recruited Dora Maria for her courage, resourcefulness, and readiness to carry out the toughest assignment.

The highly successful raid not only attracted world attention to the situation in Nicaragua, but also served as an additional impetus triggering off an armed uprising, and causing popular indignation to overflow. It was now plain that the inevitable end of the dictatorship was nigh.

CHAPTER TWO
SANDINO VS. US INTERVENTION

p The predatory character of US policies was sadly and forcefully brought home to Nicaraguans when in 1856 US filibuster William Walker's band of adventurers seized power in the country. With the US Administration's outright backing, on 12 July 1856 he proclaimed himself "President" and was at once recognised by the USA. He restored slavery and declared English the official language. A little later, a united force of Central American States ousted him from Nicaragua. The American adventurer tried several times to get back until finally in 1860 he was captured in neighbouring Honduras and executed by a firing squad.

p Jose Santos Zelaya's Liberal Administration that took over in 1893 ruled sixteen years, but the moment it planned several reforms, some bearing upon US interests, the USA decided to replace him with its own man. Commenting on the main reason for the US overthrow of Zelaya, the Cuban periodical *Bohemia* noted in May 1978, "Having seized the Panama Canal Zone, Washington sought to monopolise every possibility of constructing any waterway across the isthmus, aware of its military, political, and commercial significance. Hence, the decision to depose Zelaya, who at the time was negotiating with Japanese firms to dig an interoceanic canal through Nicaragua."

p The plot was devised and carried out by Mr. Moffat, the US Consul in Managua. On 7 October 1909, he informed US Secretary of State Philander Knox that on the next day Juan Estrada, a pro-US Nicaraguan general, would stage a mutiny. 21 On 13 October he wired the White House that the assignment had been carried out. In a dispatch, commenting on an interview with General Estrado, the *New York Times* correspondent said the General was crude and blunt when noting that US firms on Nicaragua's Atlantic seaboard had subsidised his revolution, giving him a million dollars of which the merchant firm of Joseph Beers had contributed *$* 200,000 and that of Samuel Weil about *$* 150,000.

p However, the Nicaraguans beat the rebels back. At this juncture, the US cruiser *Paducah* dropped anchor off Nicaragua and landed a force of marines, installing as President Adolfo Diaz, a former employee of the US La Luz and Los Angeles Mining Co., whose lawyer Philander Chase Knox had been before becoming US Secretary of State. Testifying before the US Senate in Washington, Republican Senator Ladd said that in 1910 US marines had invaded Nicaragua, had gunned down some 200 Nicaraguan citizens, and had installed the employee of a US firm as the nominal President, as without marine support he would have been ousted in under 24 hours.

p Some 18 months later, a popular uprising forced the US stooge Adolfo Diaz to ask his masters for help. As Lev Zubok writes in his book *US Imperialist Policy vis-a-vis the Caribbean States*, "On 4 August 1912, the first American marines arrived in Managua. New reinforcements kept pouring in, and by September 1912 there were more than 2,700

US marines in the country." By 4 October, US marines had surrounded the last insurgent bulwark, capturing and executing the rebels.

p In 1916 Jefferson, the US 'Minister in Managua, undertook to guarantee the election of a new stooge to the Presidency. S. Gonyonsky, a Soviet student of Latin American history, describes Jefferson's manipulations in his book *Sandino*: "By way of 'preparation' for the elections of 17 September 1916, Mr. Jefferson invited to the legation the Liberal candidate Iiias, and on behalf of the US State Department and in the presence of Admiral Caperton, the commanding officer of the US naval force in Nicaragua, warned that anyone refusing to support the treaty with Washington would never become Nicaragua's President, and that any presidential claimant 22 would have to coordinate his home and foreign policies with the USA, and sanction a US armed presence in Nicaragua." There thus one more Washington stooge became President, this time Emiliano Chamorro, former Nicaraguan Minister to the USA, who signed with it the treaty it so greatly sought, the document known as the Bryan-Chamorro Treaty.

p Under this treaty, firstly, the Nicaraguan Government granted the USA "in perpetuity" the exclusive right to build and use tax-free a canal along the San Juan River and the Great Lake, or any other route; secondly, Nicaragua extended to the USA a 99-year lease, up to the year 2015, on the Greater and Lesser Corn Islands, as well as the right to build a naval base anywhere in Nicaragua bordering on the Fonseca Valley that the US would find convenient, to protect its interests in the country, and that it would guarantee the USA the right later to jprolong these terms for a similar period; and, thirdly, the USA pledged to pay Nicaragua $3,000,000 in gold.

p In the ten years after, the USA behaved in Nicaragua as in a trust territory. Then, in May 1926, another uprising broke out against the latest US puppet. On 7 May, five days after the uprising began, the US cruiser *Cleveland* entered the Escondido River at the Nicaraguan port of Bluefields on the Caribbean coast, again to land marines. Washington did not even bother to invent a new pretext for intervention, which was undertaken to "protect the lives and properties of US citizens in Bluefields". On 23 December more US marines landed in Puerto Cabezas and Rio Grande, naturally again to "protect the lives and properties of US citizens".

p In a confidential memo setting out the aims and purposes of the USA's Nicaraguan policy, Robert Olds, Assistant US Secretary of State, wrote on 2 January 1927 that the Central American Zone, including the Isthmus of Panama, was the USA's legitimate sphere of influence, providing the USA sought to ensure its security and protect its interests. US Ambassadors to the five small republics between Mexico and Panama, he said, were advisors whose recommendations should be taken as the law. Central Americans knew that USrecognised and US-backed governments stayed in power, while 23 those denied that support did not. Nicaragua, he went on, had become the touchstone of US policy, and to think the USA would permit a setback there was out of the question. This information is provided in Prof. Richard Millet's book *The Guardians of a Dynasty*, excerpts from which were published in the periodical *Lucha Sandinista* in December 1978.

p On 6 January 1927, US (soldiers landed at the port of Corrientes on Nicaragua's Pacific coast. All in all, throughout the month of January 1927, the USA dispatched to Nicaragua sixteen warships, and a force of 3,900 soldiers and 865 marines, commanded by 215 officers. On 9 February 1927, the US-installed Nicaraguan President Adolfo Diaz told an AP correspondent that while he was President and under all successive governments, US marines should always be present in Nicaragua.

p The leaders of the uprising agreed to negotiate with Col. Henry L. Stimson, the personal envoy of US President Calvin Coolidge and former War Secretary in the Taft Administration, who had been entrusted with similar delicate assignments before. Thus, he had been stationed as observer during the Chilean-Peruvian War over Tacna and Arica, and had also visited the Philippines for an on-the-spot inspection. The insurgent generals gave him a letter noting that they had " resolved to lay down arms". Only one general refused—Augusto Cesar Sandino.

p On 1 July 1927, General Sandino issued his first political manifesto from San Albino, a village in Northern Nicaragua. A few excerpts from this remarkable document follow:

p "I pledge to my country and to history that my sword will redeem national honour and bring freedom to the oppressed! I shall pick up the gauntlet thrown down by the vile occupationists and traitors to my country. My men and I will build that wall against which Nicaragua's legion of enemies will fall. But should my men all fall, in championing liberty they will leave the bones of more than one interventionist battalion to whiten on the slopes of my native mountains. So come, kill us in our land, however many there are of you! I shall be waiting for you, at the head of my patriotic soldiers. Know that should this happen, our blood will rain down on the 24 white stones of your White House, that lair where criminal designs are nurtured."

p Admiral David S. Sellers commanded the US occupation force. His subordinate Marine Captain Hatfield circulated among the civilian population of the region, where Sandino was active, a handbill declaring, "Augusto C. Sandino, a former general of the Liberal Army, is outlawed. . . . The US Government cannot be held responsible for any loss of life and property that may occur in military operations conducted by ... the armed forces of the USA in the territory that Sandino has occupied." What unveiled cynicism! An occupationist committing outrages in somebody else's country dares to outlaw a patriot battling to free his country from interventionists! An interventionist calls Sandino an occupationist!

p On 16 July Sandino at the head of 100 men attacked Gap. Hatfield's garrison of 400 men in the town of Ocotal. The US command sent five bombers to Ocotal, which at treelevel height sprayed rebels and the local population with lead. More than 300 people, mostly civilians, including women and children, were killed.

p In his book *Sandino, General de hombres libres*, the Argentine historian Gregorio Selser comments: "We are in a position to note the little known fact that one of the first times military aircraft were used against peaceful inhabitants after the First World War

was in Nicaragua, eight years before Mussolini's Italians exercised in gunning down defenceless Abyssinians from the air, and ten years before the airmen of Hitler's Condor Squadron reduced Guernica to rubble."

p Sandino and his men continued to fight back. According to US Navy communiques, in the twelve months ending 30 June 1928, US marines were involved in 85 engagements against Sandino.

p Cuban national hero Julio Antonio Mella wrote, "There is but one man in Nicaragua who represents its people and upholds its sovereignty. He is the universally acknowledged Augusto C. Sandino. . . . All denying him support and entering into contact with his enemies . . . are in effect his enemies too, and traitors to the interests of the oppressed classes of the Continent,"

25

p In a letter to Sandino in July 1928, Henri Barbusse wrote, "General, I salute you on my own behalf and on behalf of the proletariat and revolutionary intelligentsia of France and Europe. ... In your person we salute the liberator, a fine soldier and fighter for the cause of the oppressed. . . . You, Sandino, General of the Free Men, head the gathering struggle and the entire Continent. Yours is a historically immemorable role!"

p Remain Rolland wrote of US intervention in Nicaragua: "The attack on this country is part of a massive offensive by North American imperialism to gain possession of the entire American continent. It is my belief that political encroachment on Nicaragua must be exposed at once."

p The occupationists sustained one defeat after another. It was plain that the US interventionists would not be able to exterminate Sandino's army, which had the support of most Nicaraguans. Washington devised another scheme, to have Sandino killed by its stooges in Nicaragua. On 23 November 1932 Sandino received from Managua an offer to open peace negotiations. He replied that he was amenable, provided all US forces were pulled out first.

p Washington had already realised that Sandino was bound to put forward this demand. It was now in a position to accept this, as it had finalised a plan initiated in late 1922 to create Nicaragua's National Guard, and no longer stood in such great need of a military presence.

p At their conference in Washington in December 1922, the Central American states had decided, upon a US motion, to create National Guands for each of these countries. These punitive units were to be under the thumb of the Pentagon and to be officered and trained by US instructors. By 1932 these instructors believed the several thousand Nicaraguan National Guardsmen ready to replace the occupation force and discharge their punitive mission. A mere eight days before the peace-talk offer to Sandino, Anastasio Somoza was appointed chief of the so-called National Guard, and on 2 January 1933 the US

occupation force pulled out, of course, without the instructors and officers in command of the National Guard.

26

p A "peace convention" was signed at midnight on 3 February. Accordingly, the guerillas surrendered nearly all their weapons and set up a farming colony under Sandino in the Coco River delta area in Northern Nicaragua, near the border with Honduras. However, Somoza's National Guard at once set about harassing the Sandinistas, jailing and killing off the unarmed guerillas. With the blessing of Mr. Arthur Bliss Lane, the new US Ambassador, Somoza schemed to seize power. As he and his patron viewed General Sandino as the only man capable of taking decisive action against the conspiracy, Somoza decided Sandino must be killed.

p On the night of 21 February 1934 Sandino and two companions, Generals Estrado and Umanzor, were treacherously captured upon Anastasio Somoza's orders, and shot dead by national guardsmen, in compliance with directives from the US Ambassador. Further, I shall quote what National Guard Lt. Abelardo Cuadra, who was involved in the execution, testified later. He was ordered to report to Anastasio Somoza at 7 p.m. Similar orders were given to Gen. Gustavo Abouns, Deputy Chief of the National Guard, Gen. Gamilo Gonzalez, Col. Samuel Santos, and several lieutenants and majors, including Lieutenant Federico Davidson Blanco, sixteen persons in all. Abelardo Cuadra testifies: "Tacho Somoza (Tacho is the nickname appended to all Somozas, and is the Spanish for "dunghill"—*Auth.}* arrived at half past eight. After exchanging greetings, he said, 'I'm just from the US Embassy, where I had a conference with Ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane, who assured me that the Washington Administration seconds and advises the liquidation of Augusto Cesar Sandino as a disturber of the national peace.' These words were received in deep silence. I myself was petrified. I knew Sandino was shadowed whenever he came to Managua, but could not even conceive of such >a crime being hatched. Tacho drew up a protocol, to make all of us shoulder responsibility. No one objected. I also signed the document. I could not act otherwise in the circumstances."

p Though Anastasio Somoza now ruled Nicaragua in all but name, Washington wanted to have him as "lawful" President. In May 1936 he led a revolt against Presidential candidate 27 Carlos Brenez Arkin and six months later, on 8 December 1936, had himself "elected" President. Ever since, the Somoza clan has ruled Nicaragua, backed by the National Guard and liberally bankrolled by the USA.

About the Somoza clan and Somoza's henchmen and patrons, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE
**THE SOMOZA DYNASTY, THE USA,
AND THE NATIONAL GUARD**

p Henrique Mora, the TASS correspondent in Costa Rica, and I were making for La Cruz, on the very border with Nicaragua, to cover a ceremony, about which further.

p As a row of cottages sprung into view on the horizon, the shadow of an airplane flitted by overhead. "Henrique, probably a big shot from San Jose," I ventured. "No, that rather be Somoza," he unsmilingly remarked. "Of course," I said, thinking he was joking, "He's come to Costa Rica for a cup of coffee, and will at once go back to his Managua bunker."

p Henrique shook his head "I'm not joking," he said. "It's a Nicaraguan airplane. Here is one of the three estates the Somoza family owns in Costa Rica They are the 14,000–hectare Murcielago hacienda, the Santa Rosa estate, and the Las Tablillas ranch, half of the latter in Costa Rica, and the other half in Nicaragua. Which means that if Somoza wants to take a stroll on his land, he can cross from country into country without any bother or formality. He never walks though; each estate has its own Airfield, and Somoza flies in and out of Costa Rica at Ins discretion, as our authorities are in no position to supervise these flights You sop how convenient it is for him The Sorno/a family smuggle acioss plentiful contraband, machinery, and equipment, even bring in farm labourers, who work in Costa Rica in violation of all local laws. Besides, until recently, without the permission of Costa Rica's Legislative Assembly, members of the Somoza family visited 29 the Costa Rican c ity of Liberia, flying across the border on Nicaraguan Air Force planes. That's how the cookie crumbles, and you fancy he's come in for a cup of coffee. If he wants to, he can fly in without any of your fancies, as this is sheer reality, borne 14 years back our Legislative Assembly decided to exproprrate part of the Santa Rosa hacienda, but as you know, it's easy enough to take a decision, and at times far hardei to carry it out."

p So did I see foi myself one of the Somoza family's countless possessions.

p When Anastasio Somoza the First, patriarch of the dictatorial dynasty, seized power, all he owned was a small coffee plantation inherited from his father, or rather, even only half of it. But by 1950 he was worth already $60,000,000 and that is the far from complete tally.

p This murderer of Gen. Sandino and founder of a criminal dynasty was exterminated by the Nicaraguan patriot Rigoberto Perez Lopez in September 1956. After his death, his son Luis took over, but from 1 May 1967 his younger son, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, has been President. For thirteen years he has usurped the office of Nicaragua's Chief of State, in fact, occupied the country.

p To provide a notion of the loot plundered over the years by the Somoza clan, let me take you on an armchair excursion around Nicaragua.

p To fly into Nicaragua we shall go to the capital of Costa Rica and board a plane of the Nicaraguan Somoza-owned Lanica Airlines. After touching down in Managua, we shall need no doubt to exchange currency at the local branch of the National Bank, which is, in effect, a Somoza-owned insurance firm. Driving into Managua, we pass several cattle ranches and coffee plantations. The Somoza family own some 50 plantations, more than 50 ranches, numerous sugar cane plantations and refineries, and tobacco and cotton plantations. Some sources say the family owns 20 percent of the entire cultivated crop area, others put it higher, at 30 percent.

p Making for downtown Managua, one will yet, on its approaches, note a steep hill overlooking the surrounding streets. Don't dare draw near, let alone climb it. For this is Tiscapa 30 Hill, the command height of the Somoza dynasty. One simply won't be let in, as there are guard towers all around, and national guardsmen at every step. On the top lie the sprawling, sumptuous residences of the Somoza family. The one fronting West was formerly home of Anastasio's brother, but now living there is the dictator's son Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero. In the second, a real fort, is the dictator himself, whose den is contained in a special underground bunker. On the southern face a steep bluff descends to the Tiscapa Valley inside the crater of a volcano.

p On the northern side the descent is not as steep, and an excellently paved road runs up the slope. However, about halfway it is blocked by a tall wall of masonry, topped by machine-gun nests manned by National Guardsmen round the clock.

p The other two buildings are an army casino serving as a club for ranking National Guard officers and US instructors and a structure known as the Tribuna Monumental, from which the dictator reviews National Guard march pasts and military parades on the broad square below. The entire territory and every building at the foot and on top of the hill are under special security guards.

p Back to our excursion. One arrives at the Hotel Intercontinental and books a room. The hotel is owned by Somoza. Then one decides to do some shopping at the Sovine, one of the city's largest stores. It is also owned by Somoza. On the fringe one spots the buildings of the Somoza-owned El Porvenir Textile Mills. Walking through the streets, one glimpses "To let" notices in house window's and learns that Anastasio Somoza is landlord of nearly 500 buildings. Feeling hungry, one steps into a restaurant, and asks for a beer and a chop, or some fried fish. Somoza owns the brewery, and controls food sales, including meat and fish. Returning to one's hotel, one switches on a lamp and TV-set. The electricity comes from the Somoza-owned Empresa Nacional de Luz y Fuerza Power Station. Tired of watching a television programme expelling Dictator Somoza (the television and radio stations are also owned by Somoza), one goes out down into the lounge to buy a copy of the newspaper *Novedades*, to find out what's on in 31 the country. The newspaper is also owned by the Somoza family.

p Listed is only a small portion of the Somoza clan's wealth. This is not restricted to plunder only at home. It has invested its filthy lucre in diverse enterprises outside the country as well. Its finances are run by the Central American Bank for Economic

Integration. It owns television and radio assembly plants, garment factories, and hotels in various Latin American countries. In Costa Rica alone it owned as of April 1965 real estate to the tune of 100 million colons.

p On 20 May 1977 the Cuban periodical *Bohemia* observed, "The Somoza family is part of the Sucesion Somoza group, Latin America's most powerful economic cartel. One shareholder was the well-known North American millionaire Howard Hughes. Relying on connections with Hughes, the cartel planned to engage in oil processing, aviation, tourism, and hotel and casino operations." Howard Hughes was a close friend of Anastasio Somoza, and after the former's death in April 1976, the latter acquired part of his cartel shares.

p How the Somoza clan plunders Nicaragua is well illustrated by the following worldwide report.

p On 23 December 1972 a disastrous earthquake struck at Nicaragua, destroying more than 60,000 homes and causing more than 10,000 deaths. Anastasio Somoza had himself appointed head of the Emergency National Committee and Managua Relief Committee. Concentrated in the hands of the first body was full civilian and military authority. Enacted was a law creating the post of a Minister for National Reconstruction, to which Anastasio Somoza had himself appointed. This body received all relief for earthquake victims furnished by various international organisations, and estimated at about $190,000,000. In a manifesto issued in April 1973, Nicaragua's opposition Social Democratic Party declared that Somoza controlled all resources collected at home and from abroad.

p Recalling the earthquake in an article published on 15 September 1978 under the heading of "The Somoza and Sons Gang", the Italian magazine *L'Europeo* noted: "The earthquake only enriched the Somoza family still more. It 32 pocketed all the money coming in from different countries, investing it in its own building firms."

p The Somoza clan makes up quite a crowd. Its eight chief members include besides Anastasio Somoza Debayle himself, his uncle Luis Manuel Debayle, his half-brother Jose Somoza Rodriguez, his cousin Luis Pallais Debayle, his son Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero, his two nephews Jose Somoza Abrego and Jose Debayle Bonilla, and his brother-m-law Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa. The uncle edits the newspaper *Novedades*, the half-brother commands an armoured battalion in the National Guard, the cousin and half-brother's son are in the Chamber of Deputies, and on it goes.

p In its New Year issue for 1979, the American magazine *Newsweek* noted: "The US Marine Corps put the Somoza family in power 42 years ago, and the current dictator has profited handsomely from that act; he has accumulated a personal fortune estimated at $500 millions." If anyone, certainly *Newsweek* knows what it is talking about. Indeed, the Somoza clan owns half the shares in the many US enterprises in Nicaragua.

p Somoza not only has a most intimate link with the Pentagon and a legion of US firms, but also has his own agents in the US Congress. Most active among these are Representatives Charles Wilson and John Michael Murphy. According to General Bermudos, Somoza's press officer, when the dictator was at West Point, his room-mate was none other than John Michael Murphy, the selfsame Murphy whom the US judiciary investigated in 1979 in connection with bribes received from the Iranian Shah's now deposed regime.

p In an article on the Somoza regime, the *Washington Post* noted on 17 October 1978, that Murphy, who has visited Nicaragua at least a hundred times and has always stayed with Somoza, so adroitly manipulated the June 1977 House debate that Nicaragua continued to receive American military aid. Further the newspaper noted that recent Congressional attempts to suspend US military aid to Nicaragua in view of reported violations of human rights there, had been unproductive, firstly, because of the Administration's resistance, and secondly, because of Somoza's close personal contacts with 33 certain US officials, who always saved him whenever the USA was particularly disgruntled with his rule.

p According to the *New York Times*, Edward Koch, a staunch opponent of Somoza's, had communicated that James Theberge, the former US Ambassador to Nicaragua, seeing him shortly before the House was to decide on military aid to Nicaragua, had assured Koch, that there were no systematic violations of human rights, in Nicaragua. Incidentally, the *New York Times* added, Theberge's predecessor had been none other than Col. Blair Shelton, whose friendship with Somoza is reflected on a Nicaraguan treasury denomination.

p We might note in passing that the current dictator's greatgrandfather once removed—his name was also Anastasio, or Anastasio Bernabe Somo/a in full—was an oidinary killer and thief. In 1849, after many crimes, he was finally apprehended and executed and his dead body was hung from a lamp post. In comparison with Anastasio Somoza, the present thug and thief, his crimes were mere child's play.

p Anastasio Somoza's "efforts" to fortify Western-style " democracy" have been acknowledged by many ranking personalities of the "free world". The list of foreign decorations awarded the dictator fills much space in the American *Who's Who*. Among them are the Grand Chain of the Order of Propicias Nubes from Taiwan, the Inter-American Defence Medal from Brazil, the Order of Merit from Haitian dictator Duvalier, and the Federal Cross of Merit from West Germany.

p . . .We were in La Cruz to attend the funeral of 14-year -old Yolanda Guido Obando, whom Somoza's national guardsmen had shot dead in the Costa Rican border area. The President with his entire cabinet led a procession stretching several blocks and mourning the victim of the latest provocation of the Nicaraguan dictator's henchmen.

p Indeed, in recent months La Cruz has become a real frontline town, where thousands of Nicaraguans, fleeing from atrocity and harassment, have found a haven. Shortly before

our arrival, four Nicaraguan air force planes strafed a neighbourhood near the Santa Cecilia ranch, three kilometres from La 34 Cruz. In this half-hour incursion of Costa Rican airspace, the aircraft machine-gunned peasants working in the fields.

p Several days earlier Costa Rican President Rodrigo Carazo granted political asylum to two defecting Nicaraguan national guardsmen, 24-year-old Placido Vallejo Rodriguez and 23–yearold Edmundo Rosa Vega Loaciga. The first had served with the National Guard a year after call-up, the second had been at an infantry school for seven months. When asking for political asylum in Costa Rica, they said conscience could no longer tolerate service in the National Guard.

p What is this soldiery, whom all Nicaraguans so strongly detest and hate? The National Guard, the USA's brainchild and backbone of the Somoza dictatorship, is synonymous with pillage, rapine, and club law. When creating it in the 1920s, the USA sought to have a docile instrument with which to implement its policies vis-a-vis the Central American states. Then it was officered by Americans and was not subordinate to Nicaragua's President.

p On 15 November 1932, the US General Calvin B. Matthews, up till then commanding officer of the National Guard, handed over his powers to Anastasio Somoza the First. In March 1939 Somoza had himself re-elected President. Shortly afterwards he was summoned to Washington to receive fresh instructions. Back home, he announced that a military academy would be founded in Managua to train an officer corps for the National Guard, and that an American would head it. Incidentally, during the American occupation of Nicaragua, Managua has a military academy under a US Army captain by the name of Trumble.

p On 8 April 1942, Somoza signed an agreement with the USA entitling it to build a military base in Corinto and extending additional rights to the exploitation of Nicaragua's matural resources.

p On 18 November 1953 the US Ambassador Wheelan and the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister signed an agreement under which a US military mission was to arrive to train the National Guard.

p In February 1954 another 54 US officers and some 700 servicemen arrived in Nicaragua for this purpose. The related 35 agreement said that the US army would cooperate with the Nicaraguan Ministry of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, and with the officer corps of the Nicaraguan National Guard to raise the National Guard's combat preparedness, organisation, and administration.

p On 19 April of the same year, negotiations were initiated in Managua to conclude a new military-aid agreement, which was signed six days later, on 25 April.

p When the USA began in 1961 to plan an armed intervention of Cuba, Nicaragua served as a mercenary training centre. Between 17 March and 20 March 1961, three US steamers

put in at the port of Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua to unload equipment for a secret US Air Force base in that country. Shortly afterwards, heavily loaded four-engined aircraft bearing no identification marks, but belonging to the US government, touched down at the base. The invasion of Cuba started on 17 April.

p After a briefing by Pesident Johnson in Washington on 6 April, three weeks later, on 1 May 1967, Anastasio Somoza, the commanding officer of the National Guard, was installed as President.

p Several months afterwards, at a special press conference in Managua he announced plans to dispatch Nicaraguan troops to Vietnam. "We will be pigs if we don't thank the USA for the more than $20,000,000 we have received," he said.

p On 22 September 1978, under the heading "Nicaraguan Developments Expose Carter Hypocrisy," the French weekly *Temoignage Chretien* quoted from the US Army Record showing that between 1970 and 1976 4,252 Nicaraguan servicemen had been trained in the USA at the Inter-American Military Academy at Fort Gulick in the Panama Canal Zone, in the psychological and special warfare academy at Fort Bragg, and at the Inter-American Defence College in Washington.

p In that same year, the London *Evening Standard* commented that the USA really controlled the Nicaraguan National Guard, which on pretext of fighting communism was perpetrating untold crimes inside the country. The paper said that 36 the National Guard was completely under the thumb of the US military mission and embassy.

p When Somoza Junior, Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero, was at the American school for psychological and special warfare at Fort Bragg in 1977, he chummed up there with Mike Echannis and Charles ("Chuck") Sanders, both Vietnam veterans and experts in "anti-guerilla warfare". He hiied both cutthroats, importing them in July that year as special instructors of anti-guerilla commandos. Enrique Mora Valverde describes their operations under the heading "A School of Killers," in the newspaper *Libertad* on 26 January 1979.

p "Echannis was, in practice, chief of the Nicaraguan Infantry School training the National Guard elite which Nicaraguans have nicknamed the 'School of Killers'. He was also head instructor of dictator Anastasio Somoza's bodyguard and his special guard. His second-in-command, 'Chuck', was in charge of two concentration camps, in Waslala and in Rio Blanco, where he directed operations by mercenaries of Vietnamese origin, former soldiers under the Thieu regime, which the people of Vietnam had overthrown.

p "The dictator's son asked Echannis to compile a special curriculum to incorporate mastery of sophisticated weaponry, war games, and a study of the so-called catechism which Echannis had compiled. Classes in this manual were conducted as follows:

p "An officer would stand in front of a line of cadets and put them questions, which they were to answer in chorus.

p “ ’What must the soldier do?’ the question would come.

p “ ’Kill, kill, and again, kill,’ the cadets would chorus the reply.

p “’Who are you?’

p “ ’Soldiers.’

p “ ’Who are you really?’

p “ ’Tigers.’

p “ ’What do tigers feed on?’

p “ ’Red blood.’

p “ ’Whose blood?’

p “ ’The blood of the people.’ "

p In 1977 alone, 6,000 M-76 rifles were shipped from the 37 USA to Nicaragua for the dictatorship’s repressive machinery. In the six years ending 1977, American weapons deliveries to Somoza put US taxpayers out to a total *$* 32,000,000.

p Earlier, I mentioned Somoza’s agents in the US Congress. As for the favour in which he is viewed by top US statesmen, this is well illustrated by the personal message which US President Carter sent Somoza in 1978.

p The contents of the letter, transmitted in mid-July, became known to the US public several days afterwards. On 1 August 1978, the *Washington Post* reported that in a personal message to Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza, President Carter had congratulated him "for promises to improve the human rights situation" in that country. The paper added that this "could have repercussions in Congress when the House votes on the Administration’s approximately $8 billion fiscal 1979 foreign-aid package”, which includes a $ 150,000 military-training grant for the Nicaraguan National Guard. Incidentally, the said grant was approved.

As one will see, for more than 40 years now, since the installation of killer Anastasio Somoza the First as President, the USA has propped this dictatorship and subsidised and trained the punitive, repressive National Guard.

CHAPTER FOUR
SANDINISTA REVIVAL

p Occupying an area of 148,000 square kilometres, Nicaragua, the largest of the Central American states, is bigger than many European states, such as Greece, Portugal, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Holland or Denmark. However, it has a population of but slightly over 2,000,000.

p "The Military and Political Platform of the Sandinista National Liberation Front", published on 4 May 1977, provides the following numerical breakdown of the country's work force:

p "Of our population of 2,000,000-odd, employed in the economy according to official statistics are 650,000; they are engaged in farming, hunting, fishing, mining, at factories, in construction, in the power industry, in commerce, transport, services, petty private enterprise, etc.

p "Of this number, more than 300,000 are engaged in farming and fishing, 4,000 in mining, upwards of 60,000 at factories, 50,000 in construction, 4,000 in power industry and utilities, 60,000 in commerce, 23,000 in transport and communication, 100,000 in banks, insurance firms, etc.

p "Factory hands, building workers, and miners comprise together with farm labourers a permanently employed work force of 150,000, and represent the country's urban and rural proletariat.

p "Factory proletariat and building workers are concentrated in Managua, Granada, and Chinandega, and to a lesser extent in Esteli and Rivas. Most farm labourers are found in the 39 Chinandega and Leon neighbourhoods, where cotton and sugar cane are grown, in Jinotepe and Matagalpa coffee regions, and also in the neighbourhoods of Managua, Carazo, and the Pacific Coast. Steadily employed farm laborers engaged on banana and tobacco plantations and on cattle and poultry farms are mostly in Chinandega, Esteli, Leon, Rivas, Boaco, and Managua."

p To furnish a notion of the plight of Nicaragua's toiling masses, *a* few mid-1976 statistics will be adequate. At that time, some 40,000 breadwinners were fully unemployed; this number includes only the officially registered. Of every 100 of the population, an average of 65 can neither read nor write; in the countryside the proportion is still higher, as many as 9 of every ten. To every 10,000 of the population, there are but six doctors; however, the situation is still worse when one realises that most medical personnel are concentrated in the bigger cities and towns. Several districts have not a single hospital. According to official data from the 1976 report of the National Building Chamber, a third of the country's building workers were without work. Some 300,000 people dwelt in absolutely substandard housing.

p A 24 August 1978 Prensa Latina News Agency report from San Jose put the country's external debt at 1,000 million dollars, or a per capita $434, a sum almost equal to the gross per capita income for all of 1977. One will easily surmise that the monthly per capita income stood at only $38. However, that is an average, deduced by lumping together the incomes of high-ranking representatives of the dictatorship raking in an annual profit of $1,000,000 and the pay of an agricultural labourer whose monthly earnings are never more than $10–15. Note how low are the living standards of the Nicaraguan workingman at a time when the dictator himself is "worth" $500,000,000!

p The country's economy is gripped by crisis across the board. The British *Financial Times* remarked on 28 November^^1^^ 1978 that its foreign debt stood at $983,000,000.

p Aware of the plight of the ordinary Nicaraguan, one will realise that sooner or later the people had to rebel against the much-hated dictatorship. On 9 September, this year, the 40 Sandinista National Liberation Front exhorted the people to support the spontaneous armed uprising.

p The beginnings of the Sandinista revival date back to 1958, when Ramon Raudales, a comrade of Augusto Cesar Sandino's, launched a guerilla movement in Northern Nicaragua. He was past 60, when with a small band he took to the mountains and exhorted the people to take up arms against the Somoza dictatorship. Though a National Guard punitive squad wiped out this tiny guerilla force with its "whitebearded Patriarch", as friends had nick-named Ramon Raudales, others caught up the Sandino banner. The very appearance of a group pitting itself against the dictatorship with arms in hand spelled a Sandinista revival.

p The Nicaraguans whom Ramon Raudales inspired were far younger, only 18–20, young enough to be his grandsons, and their leaders were as young. In 1961, several young people formed an underground revolutionary organisation which in the following year assumed the name of the Sandinista National Liberation Front. Its seven members were its leader, Carlos Fonseca Amador, Jorge Navarro, Silvio Mayorga, Santos Lopez, Francisco Buitrago, German Pomares, and Tomas Borge.

p Carlos Fonseca Amador, who was born on 23 June 1936 in Matagalpa, enrolled in the Law Department at the University of Leon in 1956, in which year with fellow student Tomas Borge, Francisco Buitrago, and the Guatemalan Manuel Angel Carillo Luna, he organised the first communist cell. In 1957 he left for Europe to attend the Sixth World Youth Festival in Moscow and the Fourth World Youth Congress in Kiev, and on 7 November took part in celebrations in Moscow of the 40th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution. Back home, he wrote a book called *A Nicaraguan hi Moscow*, and had 2,000 copies of it printed. At the time he was often seen in Managua, offering to sell his book to a passerby.

p Time and again he was arrested for vending the newspaper of the Nicaraguan Socialist (Communist) Party, and for taking part in protest demonstrations against the visit of Milton Eisenhower, the US President's brother. Once he was 41 arrested at night, when

painting "Long live Sandino!" on a wall. The National Guard tossed him into solitary, where he went on hunger strike. He was released seven days later. He usually topped the monthly list of vendors of the communist weekly *Orientacion Popular* with most copies sold.

p In 1959 he was re-arrested in Managua and deported to Guatemala, where with several comrades he began to gear himself for guerilla warfare against the dictatorship. In that same year a few score Nicaraguans formed a small guerilla force, and infiltrated Nicaragua. They called themselves the Rigoberto Lopez Column, after the patriot who assassinated Anastasio Somoza the First. However, nine of their members were killed in their first engagement, while Carlos Fonseca, grievously wounded, escaped by a fluke.

p Upon recovery, Carlos moved to Costa Rica, where with Tomas Borge and Silvio Mayorga he started the newspaper *Juventud Revolucionario*. Shortly afterwards, he went back to Nicaragua where he was again arrested and deported to Guatemala.

p The last time he was arrested was in Costa Rica in 1969. His comrades, to secure their leader's release, hijacked in Costa Rica in 1970 a United Fruit Company plane with representatives of its management on board. They demanded in exchange the release of Carlos and several other political prisoners in Costa Rican prisons. The authorities had to give in.

p Before he was killed on 8 November 1976 in the fighting against Somoza punitive forces, Carlos commanded Sandinista guerilla detachments in Northern Nicaragua.

p When in the late 1950s Carlos Fonseca Amador, Silvio Mayorga, Tomas Borge, and their comrades decided to form guerilla detachments, they still had no clear action programme, nor any firm link with the masses, which inevitably set the scene for their defeat in the field.

p In December 1959 the Central Committee of the Nicaraguan Socialist (Communist) Party, at the time deep underground, held a plenary session which resolved that a revolution of liberation would be impossible without an armed popular uprising directed and led by an independent working class party. This document went on to say that thorough 42 preparation had to be made before an armed revolutionary movement could be initiated, and that at the time the Party did not have enough manpower and resources to do so.

p The Nicaraguan Socialist Party was founded in 1944 on the crest of an unprecedented worldwide democratic upsurge inspired by the brilliant victories which the anti-Hitler coalition had scored over fascism on the fighting fronts in the Second World War It announced its foundation at a mass rally in Managua in early July that year, and since then Nicaragua's Communists have marked the day as the anniversary of their Party.

p However, it was able to operate legally only for fourteen months In this short period, it made great headway Its influence was felt in the trade unions and it started party schools

and centres, a publishing house, and its own newspaper Then, in the face of a massive reactionary offensive, it had to go underground In 1948 it was cruelly hit when the dictatorship arrested most of its leadership, broke up the Party centres, and jailed scores of Party activists.

p By the late 1950s, it had overcome its crisis and had considerably extended and strengthened its influence among the masses However, it was of the view that it was still too weak to turn to preparations for an armed uprising, and believed military operations against the dictatorship prematuie True, some of its younger members, especially from among college students and factory hands, called for decisive vigorous action guerilla warfare, and armed struggle against the dictatorship Some of these young people revived the Sandimsta movement.

p The young Sandimsta leaders, who believed armed action against the dictatorship all-important, manifestly overlooked the need for political campaigning among the broad masses They thought a mood of revolutionary awareness would infect the freedom fighters in the process of armed action Several refuted the Party's vanguard lole in the revolutionary movement, objecting to all who said that before attempting a revolution there must be a Party to direct it, moreover a Party with a clearcut programme defining the aims of the struggle for the sake of which the people would follow this Party.

p In short, the Nicaraguan Socialist Party believed it 43 premature to initiate an armed struggle against Somoza and mostly dedicated itself to building up an opposition, calling upon the working masses to struggle for the satisfaction of economic demands On the other hand, the Sandinistas ignored explanatory work among the masses, and believed that only armed action would bring success.

p From my point of view, in the early 1960s both Sandinistas and Socialists were maximalists when deciding what sort of tactics to follow in the anti-dictatorship movement It would be appropriate at this point to quote two of Lenin's pronouncements made in 1905, the time of the beginning of Russia's first bourgeois-democratic revolution.

p In a letter of 16 October 1905, addressed "To the Combat Committee of the St Petersburg Committee," Lenin wrote "Squads must *at once* begin military training by launching operations immediately, at once Some may at once undertake to kill a spy or blow up a police station, others to raid a bank to confiscate funds for the insurrection, others again may drill or prepare plans of localities, etc But the essential thing is to begin at once to learn from actual practice have no fear of these trial attacks They may, of course, degenerate into extremes, but that is an evil of the morrow, whereas the evil today is our inertness, our doctrinaire spirit, our learned immobility, and our senile fear of initiative Let every group learn, if it is only by beating up policemen a score or so victims will be more than compensated for by the fact that this will train hundreds of experienced fighters, who tomorrow will be leading hundreds of thousands " (*Collected Works*, Vol 9, p 346) Somewhat earlier, in June 1905, under the heading "On Confounding Politics with Pedagogics," Lenin wrote, "It is our duty always to intensify and broaden our work

and influence among the masses.... Without this work, political activity would inevitably degenerate into a game.... This work, as we have said, is always necessary After every reverse we should bung this to mind again, and emphasise it for weakness in this work is *always* one of the causes of the proletariat's defeat " (*Ibid* , Vol 8, p 453)

p Guerilla tactics, armed action should not be scourned even if guerilla strength is small and it is clearly impossible to win 44 through such action; at the same time the need for political action, the need to deepen and extend influence among the masses, should not be lost sight of for a moment. Only this combination will yield the results desired. Further we shall see that, eventually, Nicaraguan progressives arrived at this conclusion. However, in the 1960s by virtue of their differences, Nicaragua's patriots operated in isolation, without coordination, without a common platform, let alone a common programme. As a result, the dictator was able to stay in the saddle and smash his opponents piecemeal.

p With their comrades, Carlos Fonseca Amador, Tomas Borge, and Silvio Mayorga organised several guerilla groups that operated in the areas of Nueva Segovia and Rio Jorjo near the border with Honduras, and also in the Matagalpa and Jinotega Highlands. Originally calling themselves the Juventud Patriotica, the guerillas then changed their name to Frente de Liberacion Nacional, and in 1962 renamed themselves the Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional, which name they have retained to this day.

p When in 1962–64 many guerillas were killed in action against the National Guard, the survivors began to gird themselves for a new phase, which they opened up in 1967.

p They began to combine armed action in the highlands with urban and village operations, mostly bank raids, and started to carry on political educational work among the population. "By that time," Plutarco Hernandez, a Sandinista leader, recollects, "the people already knew who we were, acknowledged us, and watched our struggle with sympathetic interest." Upon entering one or another inhabited locality, the Sandinistas would call a meeting of peasants to describe their aims and purposes, and to exhort them to actively participate in the struggle to overthrow the dictatorship. As Plutarco Hernandez recalls, "In some places, as for instance Yaosca and Uluse, we were able to call to a meeting as many as 300 peasants at once.

p Only eight years after the start of armed struggle, in 1970, the Sandinista National Liberation Front issued its Programme, in which it called itself a "military and political organisation whose aim is to overthrow the bureaucratic and military 45 machine of the dictatorship, seize political power in the country, and form a Revolutionary Government based on a workerpeasant alliance in which all the country's patriotic and antiimperialist forces would be involved."

p Over the next five years, the Sandinistas extensively popularised their ideas, concentrated on training cadres, and acquainted the world with the aims and purposes of their movement. By 1978 they comprised a major opposition force with which the dictatorship had to reckon.

p Yet as the Sandinista movement grew, it divided into three trends, differing on the tactics to employ to accomplish the common goal of overthrowing the dictatorship. The GPP, the Guerra Popular Prolongada (Prolonged Popular War), believed victory would be won in a protracted war by mountain-based guerillas. The Proletaries on the contrary contended that political work among the urban working class was vital to overthrow the regime. The third trend, who called themselves the Terceristas or “Third-Roaders”, tried to have the GPP and Proletaries come to an understanding. Plutarco Hernandez, a Terceristas leader, noted, "The political platform of the GPP is right and so is the political platform of the Proletaries. However, we must coordinate our operations in the highlands with operations in rural and urban localities, not concentrate only on one or the other form of struggle.”

p In an interview in the Latin American periodical *Resumen* in late 1978, he time and again noted that "of late, the presence of three trends in the Sandinista National Liberation Front is less and less evident”, and that "to all practical purposes, we have already passed the phase during which different trends in the Sandinista movement were manifest”. As we shall see subsequent developments demonstrated that precisely the lack of effective joint action was chiefly to blame for the adverse results during the September 1978 events.

p Towards the close of 1978, the FSLN had a seven-men leadership, the headquarters organising and directing the activities of regional branches. Such was the political setup.

p The military setup was somewhat different. There were four fighting fronts: the Southern Front, known as the Benjamin Zeledon Front, which took in the Departments of 46 Managua, Granada, Masaya, Carazo, and Rivas; the Northwestern Rigoberto Lopez Perez Front, which was active in the Chinandega and Leon neighbourhoods; the First Northern Front, named after Carlos Fonseca Amador, that operated in the regions of Nueva Segovia and Esteli; and finally, the Second Northern Front named after Pablo Ubeda, the undercover name of the guerilla Rigoberto Cruz, that was active in the neighbourhoods of Matagalpa and Jinotega.

p Concluding the history of the Sandinista revival, one must note the following important point—the publication on 4 May 1977 of the FSLN Military and Political Platform for the Abolition of the Dictatorship, as the second enlarged and deepened programme of the Sandinista Front.

p To form a notion of how much better Sandinista political awareness had become and to what extent they had been able to jettison certain abortive conceptions obstructing development of FSLN into a truly vanguard organisation capable of leading the broad masses, it will be appropriate to note the basic points made in the afore-mentioned programme.

p Its historical section says that "by now ... the Sandinista Popular Revolution has entered the supreme concluding phase of revolutionary upsurge. . . . Evident is a worker-peasant alliance prepared ... to initiate a struggle to overthrow the Somoza gang. We then plan to

form a revolutionary popular democratic government, to allow us, proceeding from a proletarian ideology and Sandino's historic behests, to make socialism triumphant and create that society of free people of which Augusto Sandino dreamed".

p As for the aims and purposes of the revolution, the document singles out two basic goals, which are to deliver the country from foreign imperialism and from exploitation. It is pointed out that "*both historical goals will be secured, given a Marxist-Leninist approach and a firmly knit vanguard to direct the revolutionary process*". (My emphasis—*Auth.*)

p Explaining its concept of a future national leadership, this document says that the "overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship and establishment of a revolutionary democratic government represent the immediate aim of the Sandinista Popular Revolution. This government. .. will strive for national sovereignty 47 against imperialist economic and political influence. ... It will create a Sandinista worker-peasant army that will replace the National Guard and be capable of protecting the revolution's interests. ... It will place the land in the hands of those who till it. These are some of the tasks that will face the revolutionary people's democratic government. *The workers, the peasants, the students, and the revolutionary intelligentsia will comprise its social basis*". (My emphasis—*Auth.}* And further: ". . .We shall go towards socialism inscribed on whose banner is the slogan, 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his work'."

p The section considering a civil war as a means to overthrow the dictatorship notes: ". . .We speak of a civil war insofar as it is hatched by the local reactionary forces resisting the revolutionary process. This will be a revolutionary war, insofar as, *relying on a worker-peasant alliance and led by a Marxist-Leninist vanguard, it ... creates the conditions for carrying forwards . . . the process through the democratic phase towards socialism.*" (My emphasis—*Auth.*)

p Noted are the criteria for Sandinista organisation: ". . .The principal agencies of the Sandinista vanguard must *fully adhere to the revolutionary, partisan and disciplinary requirements deriving from the proletarian ideology and Party affiliation to the Sandinistas*. In the bodies of administration, ideology, and propaganda ... *it is essential to constantly ensure adherence to . . . the norms of Party life.*" (My emphasis—*Auth.*).

p The 1977 Programme already clearly defined the motive forces of the revolutionary process: "The urban industrial workers and rural agricultural workers comprise the basic class capable of effecting profound revolutionary changes in the capitalist system of exploitation. The strength, development, and organisation of this class are the guarantee that the socialist society desired will be attained. . . . Although the working class is the *basic force* of the revolutionary process of both today and tomorrow, it will not achieve its revolutionary aims without the broad backing of other segments of the people, especially *the peasantry and petty bourgeoisie* (students and intellectuals).... In our conclusions we emphasise that the working class is the *basic* force of the revolutionary process, 48 the force upon which we must always and primarily rely. The peasantry is the prime force of our revolution, by virtue both of its numerical strength and its traditional

militancy and antiSomoza and anti-American spirit.. . . The students and intellectuals, as part of the petty bourgeoisie, also play an instrumental role in the revolutionary process, are an integral element in the struggle, in which the workers and peasants comprise the vanguard. The motive force of the revolution is represented by the alliance of the three classes of the proletariat, peasantry, and petty bourgeoisie."

p Such was the platform that the Sandinistas published slightly more than a year before the September 1978 events. One must necessarily note that very little time had passed from this Programme's adoption and the flare-up of the armed uprising, manifestly inadequate for the broad masses to accept this Programme as a guide to action. Yet the very fact of Sandinista recognition of the leading role of the working class in the revolutionary process, of the need for a worker-peasant alliance, of the point that the aims set could be secured only given a Marxist-Leninist approach and a firmly knit vanguard to guide the revolutionary process, already indicates the markedly heightened level of political awareness among the Sandinista leadership.

p Whereas at the beginning of the Sandinista revival, the leadership staked almost exclusively on immediate armed action against the dictatorship, and shelved political and ideological explanatory work even among its own ranks, let alone among the masses, in recent years exceptional heed had been paid to fostering a revolutionary ideology. The Sandinistas have started such underground periodicals as *Rojo y Negro, Trinchera*, and *El Sandinista*, have built a network of underground political study groups, and have organised the printing and distribution of leaflets, communiques, and other literature about Sandinista activities, which have helped to spread the revolutionary ideology.

p Several months after the Sandinistas published their military and political programme, twelve leading intellectuals, businessmen, and clergymen issued a Manifesto supporting the basic ideas of the Sandinista Programme. The Group of 12, 49 as they came to be known, was part of the newly emerging Broad Opposition Front, in which bourgeois parties were represented. The Group of 12 firmly stated that without Sandinista participation, it would be impossible to extricate the country from the crisis into which the Somoza dictatorship had plunged it.

p Published on 17 July 1978 was the Manifesto of a new political alliance, the MPU, the United Popular Movement, which knit together a large group of opposition forces, 23 different political and public organisations. The MPU Manifesto set out the three basic goals for which the alliance had been formed. These were: "Firstly, to mobilise the people to overthrow the Somoza dictatorship; secondly, to work towards the organisation and unification of the broad masses; and thirdly, to facilitate the developing process of the unification of revolutionary forces."

p On 31 July 1978 the MPU published a 14-point Programme noting its aims and tasks, and which for the most part was similar to the Sandinista military and political programme.

p Hence, towards the second half of 1978 there were in Nicaragua in opposition to the dictatorship the Sandinista National Liberation Front, the United Popular Movement, and the Broad Opposition Front.

Although steps had been taken to consolidate anti–dictatorship forces, the opposition had still to achieve full unity. Meanwhile, Somoza was frantically and feverishly striving to fortify and broaden his repressive machinery, again relying on US help and backing.

CHAPTER FIVE
TWO INTERVIEWS

p Near the Presidential Palace and National Library in SanJose, capital of Costa Rica, is a small garden known locally as the Park of Spain. On one Sunday in January 1979 there was a greater crowd here than usual. It appeared that on the pathways several artists had put up easels in the shade of spreading trees, and several master carvers were making wooden sculptures, all reflecting contemporary life in Nicaragua. Its tragedy was well illustrated by pieces depicting a guerilla holding a submachine gun, a peasant woman sobbing in hopeless grief over the dead body of her little girl, Sandinista fighters on the offensive, village razed by National Guard soldiery, and American aircraft strafing residential neighbourhoods in Leon. The money raised by this charity drive was contributed to an aid fund for the people of Nicaragua.

p I struck up an acquaintance with two young artists, who before coming to Costa Rica only a few days prior to this art sale, had been with a Sandinista guerilla force in Northern Nicaragua. Still earlier, till September 1977, the two young men had been living with a commune on an islet in the Solentiname Islands in Lake Nicaragua, in the southern part of the country. The commune had been organised by local-born Ernesto Cardenal Chamorro, one of Latin America's best known poets.

p The Soviet reading public are familiar with Ernesto Cardenal from translations featured in the magazine *Inostrannaya Literatura* (Foreign Literature) in its June 1969 and March 1970 issues. In a foreword to these translations, Yuri 51 Dashkevich, a Soviet student of Latin American literature, wrote, "Lake Nicaragua is claimed by scientists to be the world's one and only lake infested by sharks. However far a recluse may bury himself, he will never be able to overlook that. However, these blood-thirsty sharks are not the only danger. Whatever motives a person may have for withdrawing from the world, he cannot escape or cut himself off from the problems bedevilling mankind. .. .There is no question that Ernesto Cardenal's literary produce is part of the mainstream of popular protest sweeping Latin America."

p Yuri Dashkevich is right. Ernesto Cardenal had not the slightest intention of withdrawing from the problems with which his country is beset. It was in his character to actively fight for national liberation, to join the ranks of the fighters against the dictator riding roughshod over Nicaragua. He has dedicated all his poetic fire and talent to the cause of revolution.

About a week after meeting the two Nicaraguan artists, I saw Ernesto Cardenal who happened to be in Costa Rica at the time, and he told me about himself, about how he had joined the Sandinistas, about his plans, and generally about the situation in Nicaragua at the time.

Ernesto Cardenal's Story

p “I am now 54. At first I was a professional poet, but subsequently, in 1955, I decided to enter the priesthood. Though previously a professional writer, I did not at all think that writing, the more so, of poetry, could proceed in isolation from what happens around a person, events that are part and parcel of the life of one’s people and country. For this reason I believed it my duty as poet and citizen to fight the Somoza regime and with my poetry dedicate all my energies to the battle against the dictatorship that held my country in thrall, against the old dictator Anastasio Somoza Garcia.

p “I was 31 when I withdrew into a monastery. Subsequently, in 1965, I organised with a group of young friends a kind of commune on an island of the Solentename Islands in Lake Nicaragua. Our commune existed for twelve years. We set ourselves the task of carrying on educational work among the 52 peasants, to prepare them for revolution and explain that revolution does not conflict with the Catholic faith. We interpreted the Scriptures in a revolutionary manner, as we understood them. We said that Christianity’s prime purpose was to shape a fair society, and that the goals recorded in the Gospels coincided with the goals of revolution.

p “It was only natural for us to count our commune part of the revolutionary movement in Nicaragua, of those at the outset small groupings that waged guerilla warfare in the mountains and subsequently developed into a powerful national movement. There came a time when our commune joined the Sandinistas, becoming one of the cells of this movement.

p “Our commune consisted of but twelve persons, primarily young local peasants. Though some wanted to leave the commune to join the guerillas in the mountains and fight the dictatorship, the Sandinista leadership told us to keep our commune going, as it was doing extensive explanatory work and was politically of good use. Accordingly, we were to stay put till further orders.

p “In October 1977 the Sandinista leadership recruited the younger members of the commune for its first major action. The boys and girls were only too willing to volunteer, and they began to take military training right there, on the islands. When they finished their training, they took part in a raid on the garrison of San Carlos, a small town near the islands. Both boys and girls from the commune showed courage and mettle. A few days earlier, I left for abroad on a mission for the Sandinista leadership, leaving behind only those who were to take part in the raid.

p “After the raid the boys and girls involved stayed with the guerillas and are now Sandinista fighters. Meanwhile, our community, with all its buildings, was completely destroyed by Somoza’s soldiers. The church was turned into a National Guard barrack and the library and arts and crafts shops were ruined. In short, nothing is left of our twelve years of work.

p “In Nicaragua I was tried *in absentia* and sentenced, as far as J know, to 15 years of prison. Ever since, I have been in exile, working for the Sandinista International Liaison Committee. I have been appointed to represent the 53 Sandinistas abroad, and in the years

since have visited quite a number of countries. That's all I think I can tell you about myself. Recently I was in Moscow at a session of the World Peace Council, and a little before that, in Prague where I attended a Christian Peace Conference.

p "This year an International Congress of Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua in their struggle against the Somoza dictatorship is to be held. For our struggle international solidarity is of major importance. Of course, there is no question that the armed struggle is decisive. The armed struggle cannot be carried on successfully without the support of the people and the guerillas have that support. But international backing is also vital, as without it our struggle would be far less effective. It is essential for the world to know about the popular movement in Nicaragua, because if it doesn't it will leave a free field for US imperialism to intervene in Nicaragua in the belief that this will not arouse world protest. Hence, to bar imperialism's dirty designs, to thwart the outright intervention that US imperialism may undertake at any moment, mounting international solidarity is vital for us.

p "A few words now about the repressive actions of the Somoza regime. To this day in Nicaragua young people all over the country are killed daily. They're killed only because they're young. Killed are even boys and girls taking no part in the struggle, who don't know why they're being killed. Nor do their killers know whether or not their victims are involved in the movement against the dictatorship. They're killed simply because they're young. Whenever the killers come across a young person in the street, they kill him or her only because of youth. To be young in Nicaragua today is a crime, as the killers think a young Nicaraguan is bound to be a revolutionary and a Sandinista. Of course, that's not far from the truth. The terrible thing is that Nicaragua is losing its young generation. The ruination of the national economy, the demolition of cities and towns by Somoza's forces of repression are nothing compared to the liquidation of our main asset and treasure, our young people.

p "A young man may go out to pass the time of day with friends, or for a date with his girl, or may set out in the 54 morning to his job, and find himself arrested right then and there, in the street, taken away, and disappear forever. Sometimes the dead bodies are found in the mortuary, sometimes on refuse heaps, in backyards, on vacant lots, or by the roadside. With fractured legs and arms, with broken heads, and gouged eyes. And sometimes with tongues cut out, or genitals cut off. But in most cases, the arrested simply disappear and nobody hears about them, the more so, sees them, again.

p "Note that the butchers have let loose wholesale repression against peasants living in places where guerillas are active, that is, in most of the country. Punitive squads burn down peasant homes, rape peasant women, brutally torture peasants, burn them alive, or take them up in helicopters and throw them out from high up. They kill off peasant women, the aged, and the children, even nursing babies. With every day, the terror assumes ever broader proportions. We think mankind should not look on indifferently, not twiddle its thumbs, not fencesit while such appalling club law is rampant in Nicaragua, while its people so inordinately suffer. However, thus far the world knows very little as to what is going on in our country, or about the monstrous terror there.

p “We very much want all countries, especially the Soviet Union, to work tirelessly to expose the crimes of the butchers. We want the Soviet Union daily to publish exposures of the atrocities perpetrated by Somoza and his agents in Nicaragua. He is committing genocide plain and simple; he is destroying the people of his country. For us, what the Soviet Union says is most important.

p “As for the other side, as for those who back Somoza, it should be emphasised that his main advocate is the USA, as it was the USA that created the Somoza dictatorship. Somoza the First was puppet chief of the National Guard, the occupation force that the USA knocked together. In effect, the National Guard is a North American army, a US occupation force in Nicaragua, created by the USA, armed by the USA, and trained by the USA. Then, Somoza gets most of his economic assistance from the USA. Though of late he has not been getting any weapons from the USA, he gets US-made arms from Israel; the USA is arming Somoza through Israel. Apart 55 from that, Somoza has other sources wherewith to buy arms. China is purchasing large amounts of cotton from Nicaragua, and Somoza is using this money to buy weapons. Such are the quarters propping up the dictatorship.

p “Ever since I was forced to emigrate, I haven’t had a chance to write poetry, as I have considered myself obliged to devote all my energies to the movement against the Somoza dictatorship. But when we win, I shall again write poetry, to describe my people’s gallant exploits. It is my belief that poetry is an effective weapon, and for that reason when the revolution wins, I shall write poetry again.”

It took me quite a few days to catch “Rojer”, one of the chiefs of the Sandinista Foreign Policy Committee. Although known to be somewhere in San Jose, he would often change his address, now spending the night with friends on the northern outskirts, only to move to a new address the next day. Although quite legally in San Jose, he had to take precautions, as nobody could guarantee his safety, nobody could be sure that Somoza’s agents were not snooping around in San Jose, ready at any moment to kill him as one more Sandinista. Finally we met in early February, and below is part of the interview I recorded.

Commandante Rojer’s Story

p “My real name is Miguel Castaneda. I’m a member of the Foreign Policy Committee of the Sandinista National Liberation Front, in which I am responsible for liaison with European states. My guerilla alias is Rojer.

p “I have been with the Sandinistas since 1965, at first in a University cell. Since 1968 I have been a full member of the Sandinista Front, and for the last ten years have been carrying out various assignments, such as establishing contacts with the student movement, or doing work in the Chinandega and Leon area in Western Nicaragua. Till 1976 I represented Central American student associations, and in 1970 and 1971 organised the student movement and set up student associations. 56 The Foreign Policy Committee is currently establishing contacts with progressives and public organisations

in many countries. We establish relationships with all forces against the dictatorship, who are behind our people in their struggle, and who can aid this struggle. We know that the socialist countries are wholeheartedly with the patriotic forces of Nicaragua.

p “The Sandinista Front arose when several anti-dictatorial groups merged. At the outset these groups undertook small military operations against the National Guard. Thus, between 1954 and 1962, they carried out 32 such armed actions. Who were their members? Some came from the bourgeoisie, others were of popular stock, while some are Sandinista veterans, people who fought against the dictatorship when General Sandino was still alive.

p “However, all these armed operations were unsuccessful. Now we know why. This was because the groups were weak and poorly organised, and because their operations were badly planned. Finally these groups began to merge. After much hard work, the Sandinista Front was created in 1962 and started to operate. Of course, at the outset it still displayed the same mistakes that had hitherto beset each group; they were inevitable, and are bound to happen in practically any revolutionary movement. We were greatly influenced at the time by the victorious Cuban Revolution of 1959. It has a great impact, especially on our young people, who sought an outlet in armed struggle, and who believed that only through armed struggle they would be able, with all the people of Nicaragua, to bring down the dictatorship. Carlos Fonseca Armador, our General Secretary, said that the Sandinista Front originated from groups who had plunged into war, had started a shooting war simply because conscience had prodded them to do so. This awakened conscience gave them the initial impetus. They did not draft any definite strategy in their struggle, did not set themselves any goals, did not have any clear-cut political programme. They were simply ashamed to see the world regard Nicaragua as Somoza’s personal fief, as a testing field for US imperialism. Which is why they decided to fight the dictatorship, to show that this perennial regime had not crushed the people, had not brought the people to their knees.

p “Despite the defeats, these first few years did not pass without trace, without results. With every year we gained experience, a greater awareness, rid ourselves of old mistakes and worked out truly revolutionary tactics and strategies. True, this cost us dear; very many comrades perished. These sacrifices might not have occurred had we worked out a clear-cut programme and trained cadres before starting out. That is cadres for both political and military operations. However, in recent years, we have turned from guerilla tactics plain and simple to military operations that are now linked with the broad masses. We already had contacts with the working-class movement. In fact, these were not just contacts, but ideological and political links, as we were already combining an armed struggle with political work, explaining our programme to the broad masses.

p “In 1970 the Sandinista National Liberation Front drafted its first political programme, an action programme calling for the overthrow of the dictatorship and for economic and

social reform. By 1974 we had also discussed ideological matters with other opposition forces in the country.

p “When we were elaborating our military and political programme, the one we published on 4 May 1977, that set out our ideological principles and our strategy, it was only natural for Sandinistas to differ, which is logical for any organisation in the process of making. Let me repeat that these differences arose at a time when we were defining the tactics of our struggle against the dictatorship, the tactics and the strategy, when we were deciding which strategy to adopt in the movement against the dictatorship in order to depose it. There thus arose various trends in our movement, which are now a matter of common knowledge. What we are trying to do is to select all that is beneficial from each of these trends, and brush aside all that is wrong in them, to thus create an amalgam of opinions upon which to base our strategy of struggle. However, the main thing, and all trends concur in that, is to capture the minds of the masses, to get the masses follow the movement.

p “We realise that we shall be able to terminate the Somoza dictatorship only through joint action, only by a united front. Our organisation has survived a serious crisis because of the 58 various trends that emerged, but by now we have almost completely overcome the consequences. We know that we shall be successful and win only if all Sandinistas unite, only if we are united with the Nicaraguan Socialist Party, and are allied with all not only anti-Somoza, but also anti-imperialist patriotic forces.

p “To end the dictatorship and effect the necessary social reforms, we must first cope with a range of problems.

p “The MPU, the United Popular Movement, came into being in Nicaragua in 1978. Represented in it are not only Sandinistas, but also Left-wing political parties, the trade unions, and student associations—in short, most of the country’s democratic and progressive forces. Why was the MPU newly organised? We are aware that success will not be won by armed struggle alone. Our struggle must be accompanied by a popular movement involving all organisations and using every accessible means.

p “The bourgeois information media are trying to cajole the public in their respective countries into believing that Nicaragua’s problem revolves exclusively around Somoza, that it has already been solved in practice, as Somoza’s days are numbered, and that when he goes there will be no problem; hence, there will be no need to expand a campaign of international solidarity with Nicaragua, as once the problem is solved, there should be no logical need for international solidarity in support of its masses. The imperialist propaganda machine suggests that if Somoza is ousted there will then be no need for an armed struggle, for military operations, as there will supposedly be no cause. We believe it vital to emphasise that information media representing truly democratic forces in the world, especially in the socialist countries, should work hard to explain the true aims and tasks of the popular movement in Nicaragua, pointing out that this is a struggle not merely against one single despot, but against an imperialist-backed dictatorship. As military, let alone political, pressure is being brought to bear on the people of Nicaragua,

we too must respond with military action. Tactics may vary, but one thing is unquestionable, and that is: while the imperialist-backed dictatorship continues, the armed struggle against it will 59 continue. The whole world must be shown the need to destroy the dictatorship's machinery of repression, the American-created National Guard, for without that it will be impossible to institute democratic reforms in Nicaragua; meanwhile an army of repression can be done away with only by armed force.

"It is our view that the democratic press of the world should focus on this aspect of the Nicaraguan problem, in order to debunk the arguments trotted out by the bourgeois information media."

CHAPTER SIX
THE SEPTEMBER 1978 UPRISING

p Now that you have an idea of the history of the Sandinista movement and of the Somoza dictatorship and its backers, and also of what the opposition in Nicaragua seeks to achieve, let us return to August 1978.

p The successful Carlos Fonseca Armador raid stirred up the entire country. A nationwide strike followed on 25 August, paralysing industry, transport, and trade. The only demand made was that Somoza go at once.

p On 27 August barricades were erected in Nicaragua's third largest city of Matagalpa. When the punitive National Guard force that the dictator dispatched to this city fired on the demonstration, Sandinistas repulsed the attack, and the insurgent populace seized control of virtually the entire city.

p On 29 August Somoza ordered Matagalpa bombed. For several days the insurgents held the city, but on 3 September, after another massive bombing raid, Somoza forces captured the ruined city and took massive reprisals against the unarmed population. Somoza thought thereby to frighten the people, but the reverse occurred, the wholesale massacres in Matagalpa serving as the last straw. A spontaneous uprising erupted.

There follows an excerpt from a Sandinista communique: "The spontaneous uprising swept every department in the country. At this juncture we had to decide whether to lead the people into an open battle against Somozaism, or pending a more auspicious situation, more arms and better organisation to ensure overall victory, leave the people in the lurch in their struggle against the tyranny. On 9 September, we 61 called upon the people and the FSLN armed detachments to rise up and rally around the slogan of 'Death to Somozaism!'. Thus 9 September ushered in a new phase in the armed uprising."

Panorama, 9–16 September

9 September

p The nationwide general strike continues. Armed uprisings flare up in Leon, 90 kilometres west of the capital, in Esteli, north of Managua, in Chinandega, which has a population of 30,000, and in Diriamba, 40 kilometres from Managua.

At 6 a.m. in line with a unified plan, Sandinistas attack National Guard posts in Managua, Leon, Chinandega, and Esteli. Scores of soldiers are killed, and large quantities of arms and munitions are captured.

10 September

p At 8 a.m. Sandinistas launch armed operations against the National Guard in the Managua, Masaya, and Carazo Departments. Sandinistas control many districts in Masaya, Esteli, Chinandega, and Chichigalpa.

p Somoza aircraft bomb urban neighbourhoods and at tree level strafe houses and streets, inflicting numerous civilian casualties.

Carlos Tunnerman, one of the Group of Twelve and former Rector of Nicaragua's National University, agrees to a Sandinista proposal to form a provisional government. The National Guard seal off Leon and Chinandega. There is general confusion in Managua. In a broadcast, Somoza declares he is in full control.

11 September

p The National Guard intensify repressions in Masaya, and Esteli, where a 30-day martial law and curfew go into force from 11 September. Fires rage in the bombed cities. In Diriamba the uprising gathers momentum. Sandinistas occupy the Los Manos National Guard outpost in Northern Nicaragua, near the border with Honduras.

Life in Managua is at a complete standstill. National Guard patrols the streets, gunning down all young persons caught out of doors.

The testimony of Managua refugee Jose Santo Cordero—as related to me in Costa Rica on 3 February 1979:

p "About crimes committed in Nicaragua that have victimised friends, acquaintances, and relatives: one young man, a distant relative of my wife's nicknamed Pulga, who lived in Managua's Rigiero neighbourhood, was detained on a baseball diamond on 11 September last, and tossed into a National Guard jeep, that we call the BEGAT. He was beaten up, tortured, and died of wounds. His dead body, the face beaten to a pulp, was tossed out into the yard. The three other young men, whose names I do not know, who were detained with him, were also tortured to death.

p "In San Isidro, another district in Managua, a girl and her brother, both children of a National Guard sergeant, and their uncle were tortured by the National Guardsmen. These three neighbours of ours were going to Vera Cruz. The girl's brother was in his first year at high school. At four o'clock in the afternoon, a BEGAT jeep passed by, National Guardsmen seized him, tossed him into the vehicle, and drove him off to a place called Concepcion. Another two young men were also seized with the boy and his sister. In Concepcion the three boys were pushed out of the jeep and submachine guns were fired at them. Two were killed, but as it was dark when they reached the place—it was about 6 p.m. and dusk had fallen—they missed the third. As for the girl, they drove further on, gang-raped, and killed her.

p “On the next day the lad who had escaped death by a fluke called on the relatives of the dead girl and boy and their uncle, and told them that the three had been killed. The parents hunted high ^and low for the bodies of their children. They found their boy’s body, but the girl’s body was found only two days later at the mortuary. When the mother came and asked the lid of the coffin to be lifted, she saw that the girl’s arms had been lopped off and her breasts cut 63 off. The dead girl lay there in the coffin horror imprinted in her glazed open eyes.

p “It is really impossible to give all the names, there are so very many of them. How many times National Guardsmen would break into a house and order everyone inside to come out. Those who didn’t obey were dragged out, stood up against a wall, and shot dead. It made no matter, men, women, or children. At best they might tell those over 15 to stand to one side and those younger to the other. However, should a 12- or 13-year-old appear older, he would also be ranked with the adults and shot, with no explanation afforded.

“So you can well imagine our plight. Our people, every man jack of us, are prepared to fight and will fight to the bitter end, until the Somoza dictatorship is completely destroyed, until the gang of criminals they call National Guard is exterminated. But we don’t have enough arms or help.”

12 September

p More than 300 mercenaries arrive from El Salvador and Guatemala. Rumours are afoot in Managua that Somoza’s cousin, Luis Pallais Debayle will soon take over.

p Comandante Cero (Eden Pastora Gomez) tells a France Presse News Agency correspondent that 1,100 guerillas in twelve FSLN regional organisations are fighting in the anti-Somoza revolution.

p Bitter fighting between Sandinistas and National Guardsmen continues in Leon, Chinandego, Esteli, and Masaya, in which last town more than 200 civilians are killed.

p From his Tiscapa Bunker Somoza declares that in a contingency he will ask GONDECA, the Central American Defence Council, to send troops to Nicaragua. In Washington, a US government spokesman warns that if necessary, aircraft will be sent to Managua to evacuate US citizens there.

The OAS, the Organisation of American States, issues a news letter reporting that it has initiated an analysis of the Nicaraguan situation to solve the crisis into which the country has been plunged.

13 September

p Armed clashes between Sandinistas and National Guardsmen occur near the Costa Rican border. Reports from Managua say a two-hour battle was fought in Cardenas, a town at the southern tip of Lake Nicaragua, some three kilometres from the Costa Rican border.

p Banks in several Central American countries refuse to accept Nicaraguan currency.

p Several US newspapers advertise for mercenaries to fight for Somoza in Nicaragua.

p From today on, the state of seige is extended to the entire country.

In a nationally televised broadcast, Somoza publicly admits that between 9 and 13 September some 700 officers and men "deserted from the National Guard over these five days".

14 September

p The Prensa Latina News Agency reports that Somoza is getting arms from Israel.

p Panama and Venezuela send airplanes and helicopters to Costa Rica to ward against possible Nicaraguan aggression against that country.

p Somoza announces a call-up of National Guard reservists.

p The situation in the various cities and towns as of 10 a.m. is as follows:

p Managua—sporadic rifle and submachine-gun fire.

p Diriamba—some 100 Sandinista guerillas attack the local National Guard garrison.

p Rivas—fires break out all over the city. Sandinistas exchange fire with National Guardsmen before retreating to the downtown section.

p Masaya—no armed clashes.

p Esteli—insurgents still hold the downtown section and most public buildings.

p Chinandega—the situation is vague, with Sandinistas and other opposition civilian forces still controlling most of the city.

Leon—the entire downtown section is ablaze. Somoza 65

This “opponent” of Somoza is only five

Somoza’s National Guard was an army of occupation in its own country

On Somoza’s orders bodies were not buried They were left lying in the streets, and then petrol was poured over them and they were burned

The officers of Somoza’s National Guard were well-fed executioners trained at American military academies

“Life in Nicaragua has returned to normal,” Somoza announced after putting down the uprising in September 1978 People walk along the streets carrying white flags

A town after a raid by Somoza’s bombers

National Guardsmen were a bulwark of American imperialism and of Somoza’s regime in Nicaragua

Training in a Sandinista camp

In a Sandinista camp. Comandante Felix conducts a political class

Instruction in marksmanship

Women go into battle side by side with men

A lunch break

“Why did I join the Sandinistas’ Because as a schoolteacher, I am deeply concerned about the future of our country’s children"

Teachers, factory workers, peasants, college students and others, in short, the whole people, are represented in the Sandinistas

Nora Astoria is one of Nicaragua’s heroines

Their uniforms were captured from Somoza, which means they are American-made

airforce planes bomb and machine-gun the San Felipe, Subtiava, Zaragoza, and San Juan residential neighbourhoods.

***The testimony of a Leon refugee, Eddi Torez, as related to me on 3 February 1979 in Costa Rica*:**

p “On 14 September last, Sornoza’s National Guard criminally bombed Leon residential neighbourhoods. I was living at the time in the San Juan neighbourhood, between 9th Street and 8th Avenue, in my sister’s house, where also staying were her son and a friend of mine whose own house, or rather shanty of old corrugated tin and plywood offered no protection from the strafing and bombing.

p “The bombing continued the next day, with aircraft pounding residential neighbourhoods from 6 o’clock in the morning without letup until darkness at 7 o’clock in the evening. We were also shelled by North American Sherman tanks and strafed by helicopters. Three friends of mine were killed. One, his name was Adrian, took no part in the uprising, but as he was young, and as the dictator’s butchers were killing all young people, they seized him and shot him dead too. Another friend of mine, Oralio, was killed

by a patrol. They threw his dead body out into the yard of his parents' house and as they did not allow them to bury him at the cemetery, his grave had to be dug in the yard. A third friend, his name was Manuel, was also seized by Somoza soldiers. One of them pulled out a pistol, put the muzzle to Manuel's nose and shot it off. Then they kicked him to death. This all happened on 14 September.

p "Nearly the entire population of Leon, some 95,000, were for the Sandinistas. They helped to dig trenches and put up barricades. By 15 September—the city had been in the hands of the insurgents for several days—Leon had neither water, gas, nor electricity. Somoza's National Guard killed and slew undiscriminatingly—even Red Gross nurses. I saw all this with my own eyes.

p "On the 16th, CONDEGA units, units of a US-created army made up of detachments from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras entered the city. With them were some others in uniform, only not Latin Americans, but Chinese and 66 Vietnamese, who several years earlier had fled from Vietnam with the North Americans. Our comrades overheard conversations between CONDECA officers and the pilots who had bombed Leon. They spoke English, which makes it absolutely certain that the aircraft were piloted by Yankees.

"I don't know whether any of my family are alive. I have been here in Costa Rica since 28 September. Myself, I'm a worker from a slaughter house."

15 September

p Plutarco Hernandez, a Sandinista leader, says 500 mercenaries from among Cuban counter-revolutionaries trained in Miami have come in from Guatemala and El Salvador. Although Pedro Diego Landa, War Minister of Honduras, has stated that the sending of Central American troops to Nicaragua is out of the question, the very fact of a CONDECA troop presence in Nicaragua, which is confirmed by numerous eyewitness accounts, exposes the Honduras Minister's statement as a lie.

p Channel 7 of Costa Rican television presents documentary sequences from Nicaragua, clearly showing that National Guardsmen are armed with Belgian rifles and Israeli submachine guns.

With air, armour, and artillery support, more than 2,000 National Guardsmen launch an offensive against Sandinistaheld neighbourhoods in Leon. There are many civilian casualties.

***The testimony of Leon refugee Benessa Torres, as related to me on 3 February 1979 in Costa Rica*:**

p "I lived in Leon's San Luis neighbourhood, my family in the Benita Dolores neighbourhood. A trained nurse by profession, during the uprising I looked after the wounded and rendered first aid. In the daytime I had my hospital job to do, after that I

would rush home to tend the wounded in the Sandinista field hospital near my home. The hospital where I worked was in a neighbourhood controlled by Somoza's National Guard, and each day I had to sneak back into Sandinista liberated areas. That was a nightmare. My best girl friend 67 was killed before my very eyes. Somoza's guardsmen grabbed her—her name was Maricsa—gang-raped her, killed her and left her dead body to lie on the road. At the hospital where I was working, I filched medicines and antibiotics for the wounded Sandinistas.

p "Many fled from the neighbourhood held by the National Guard, where they lived in casuchas shaiitytowns, in houses, if you can call them that, made of crates, plywood, and scraps of tar paper and took cover in brick houses from the bullets and bombs. Whenever National Guard bandits captured a neighbourhood, they burst into homes, dragged out everyone, and killed them.

p "On 15 September, when I was making my way home to later visit the wounded Sandinistas, I saw my 16-year-old brother Antonio killed with another boy whose name was Emilio Roberto. This happened in our neighbour's house, where we all lodged because our home was also a casucha. An hour after I came home, the National Guard occupied our street; Guardsmen burst into the neighbour's house where we had found refuge, and ordered everybody out, men and women. There weren't any grown-up men there, only boys of 15 and 16 years of age. The women and children cried, wept, and begged the soldiers not to kill them.

p "The National Guardsmen dragged my brother and the other boy, Emilio Roberto, out into the yard, told them to make the sign of the cross, and then shot both of them in the head. Mother didn't know that Antonio had been killed. She heard the shots, but that was a time when shots were fired very often, and she didn't know that it was these shots that had killed our Antonio, and the other boy, Emilio Roberto. But when our neighbour cried, 'Rosa, they've killed your boy!', mother rushed out into the yard and found Antonio still breathing, A National Guardsmen yelled, 'We're gonna finnish off your bastards! Scram, you old hag, or you'll get a bullet too!' They dragged mother away and before her eyes fired another shot into Antonio. Then they went away, and we buried brother in our neighbour's little courtyard. "Somoza has many butchers like that. I want to give the names of some of them. For instance, Pablo Aguiler, one of 68 the ringleaders tormenting and torturing people, and also Antonio Espinales, Clicho Donas and Augostin Obando, all from Somoza's National Guard.

"We are now in Costa Rica, a land that has given us shelter, but we have every faith that we will return home to Nicaragua. Only to a free Nicaragua, without the hangman Somoza and his running dogs of the National Guard, which the USA has trained and armed."

16 September

p Leon's National University is fully destroyed in a Somoza air raid. Leon is bombed incessantly ten hours running.

p In Masaya, the National Guard capture the Monimbo neighbourhood and massacre civilians. Women are gang-raped and National Guard bandits gun down everyone encountered.

Guatemala's guerilla leaders publish an appeal to the nation stating that on that day guerillas had attempted to carry out the verdict against Brigadier Edmundo Meneses Cantarero, Nicaragua's Ambassador in Guatemala. More specifically, they say, "Meneses Gantarero enjoyed special privileges amongst Guatemala's authorities and army commanders. Exploiting his ambassadorial position in Guatemala as smokescreen, he actually discharged the duties of coordinator between the Guatemalan Army and the Nicaraguan National Guard, and also between Somoza and Guatemala's reactionary government. He coordinated political repression for all of Central America, and the operations undertaken by the governments of this area against popular revolutionary movements. He drafted plans for a United Central American Army (CONDEGA)". (General Cantarero died of wounds several days after the assassination attempt.—*Auth.*)

17 September

p There is bitter fighting in Penas Blancas. The National Guard declares it is in control of Chinandega and Esteli. Central American news media report a letter, dated 10 August 1978, in which representatives of American religious communities visiting Nicaragua ask President Carter to suspend all 69 aid to Somoza. There follows an excerpt from the US Senate Record for 22 September 1978:

p ".. .We spoke firsthand with poor people who testified that their homes and means of livelihood had been confiscated by Guardia (National Guard—*Auth.*) officials for personal gain. We saw arbitrary taxes imposed on the highways (the so-called 'Colonel's tax') and observed tax legislation passed by the Congress in the absence of a true quorum, establishing massive sales and business taxes that our Jesuit analysts in Nicaragua assured us are intended only to liquidate the national debt and not serve the poor in any form or fashion. . ..

". . .The people believe that the Guardia had not only a license to kill, but orders to kill, in order to physically smash any public opposition to the regime. We believe there is truth in that view.. . ."

18 September

p The Organisation of American States resolves to convene on 21 September a consultative conference to discuss Nicaragua. Paraguay casts its vote against, Trinidad and Tobago abstains. The OAS institutes an inquiry in Costa Rica to elucidate circumstances attending overflights of Costa Rica by Nicaragua aircraft.

Somoza dispatches 1,200 National Guardsmen to Penas Blancas.

19 September

Insurgents continue to hold Esteli. National Guardsmen pillage captured cities and towns.

20 September

p Somoza declares he has "no intentions of designating a successor". Venezuelan Air Force planes leave Costa Rica for home.

p Esteli's fall and its rapture by the National Guard is reported this morning.

p The USA announces plans to study "reports of brutalities" in Nicaragua.

p On 21 September the National Guard crushed the last pockets of popular resistance, thus completing Operation Omega. The list of casualties, overwhelmingly civilian, includes some 5,000 killed and more than 7,000 wounded. In this punitive operation, Somoza employed a force of 6,200 National Guardsmen, supplemented by North American mercenaries, Cuban and Vietnamese counter-revolutionaries, and several hundred more mercenaries from Central America.

p In Leon, Nicaragua's second largest, 231-year-old city, more than 2,400 people were killed and it lies in ruins. The textile town of Masaya has also been almost completely destroyed by National Guardsmen. The punitive squads that have occupied the meat and dairy centre of Chinandega are looting and shooting indiscriminately.

p In a France Presse interview, Leon Archbishop Manuel Salazar Espinoza stated, "I shall stay here in this, my city, until I die. Words fail to describe what government troops have been doing with respect to the peaceful population here."

p In Leon's San Juan district, one sees everywhere the newly dug graves of the victims of National Guard brutality. A France Presse dispatch says National Guardsmen burst into homes to drag out and shoot all male inhabitants of 14 and over.

p On 15 September the *Washington Post* featured a story headed "He Was Crying: 'Don't Kill Me, Don't Kill Me!' ". It says in part, "At least 14 young men were killed last Friday afternoon on a two-block stretch of Santiago Arguello Avenue here (in Leon—*Auth.}*. All of them, according to family members and neighbours, were executed by submachine guns at point-blank range by the Nicaraguan National Guard and all of them begged for mercy.. ..

p "The eyewitnesses' story of the executions is supported by physical evidence on the scene and by countless similar reports, primarily here in Leon, of National Guard atrocities duiing nearly four weeks of civil war. . . .

p "President Anastasio Somoza, asked last night by NBC Television about alleged indiscriminate killings, replied: 'In any civil strife in any country when . . . you have to

go after insurgents, some people get hurt without cause.' Asked if he 71 was satisfied with the National Guard's peifonnance, he said, 'Yes'. . . ."

p This time the dictator managed to stay in the saddle. In etfect. after 16 September it was clear that the National Guard had been able to crush the armed uprising. Why did Nicaragua's people fail to topple the much-hated regime in September 1978?

p In an analysis of the uprising, any unbiased observer will necessarily conclude that the overwhelming majority of the population were against the Somoza dictatorship. However, the Sandinistas were not under one unified command. Their three different factions operated in isolation, without a common plan. Decisions were taken on the spot. Coordination was absent, not only between forces fighting in various parts of the country, but even within the limits of one or another area.

Indicative in this respect are facts provided by *Trinchera* (Trench), the organ of the GPP (Prolonged Popular War), one of three factions of the FSLN, for November 1978. There follows its account of operations conducted by Sandinistas of all three factions in Chinandega between 9 and 16 September.

"9 September

p "6:35 a.m. A group of armed men throw up a barricade near the Isabel Lizano and Commercial Schools. When a National Guard whippet tank moves up, the insurgents retreat to the eastern quarter.

p "Near Colonia Market another group of insurgents seize a truck and making it the strongpoint of their barricade, exchange fire with National Guardsmen.

"In La Cruz neighbourhood in the northern sector, *leachr'i of GPP and Piolctarios gioups assemble detachments* (my emphasis lieie and further—*Auth.*), and send them ofl to build barricades Troop movements near the city and fleeing < ivilians in cars piled high with personal effects are seen this night. All signs indicate that the uprising has begun.

72

"Sunday, 10 September

p "Between 6 and 7 a.m., *we attack* the El Picacho Airport and fight in the Colonia Venerio sector. One of our comrades directs the erection of barricades in the San Lorenzo area and agrees on joint action with Proletaries who planned to dig in by the bridge near the entrance to the city.

p "On the fringe of the eastern sector of the Calvario Norte district, Terceristas erect a barricade around an overturned truck. *Our men* throw up similar barricades in the Libre sector.

p “At 7 p.m., our GPP comrade directs residents putting up barricades. *Terceristas also erect barricades* in the southwestern sector of Calvario district.

p “In La Cruz district, one of our groups *contacts Terceristas leader* and agrees to form a unit armed with home-made grenades and contact bombs. In this district we *instruct the population* assisting us how to choose positions, take up defences and dig trenches. *We recruit a unit and put one of our men at its head.*

“While in the Calvario district, *we contact people in charge of Terceristas and Proletaries groups to confer to coordinate action. We discuss how to straddle roads into the city, hut fail to reach an agreed decision.*

“*Monday, 11 September*

“In the San Lorenzo and Libertad neighbourhoods, steps are taken to gather weapons. This night *we again contact the Terceristas* to say that it is necessary to mount an assault, as the enemy is planning to wear us down. We *decide to meet once again at 5 a.m.* The enemy opens fire near the bridge, we reply, *and Terceristas and Proletdrios come to our help.* In the evening, a *Terceristas replenishment comes to the support of* barricade defenders in the Libre sector. A leadership is set up for the Rosario zone, but the men under it can do little, as *their political grounding is weak* and there are not enough arms.

“*Tuesday, 12 September*

“*We meet the Terceristas at 5 a.m. to discuss the situation, and decide to extend joint operations.* GPP fighters operate in the downtown section, the Terceristas undertake to defend the Calvaiio perimeter. One of our groups, together with anarchists and Terceristas, seize the house of Deputy Irma Guerrero, where we capture two machine guns and then advance towards the market. *In the evening we discuss the situation with the Terceristas and Proletdrios.* At last we contact our comrades responsible for the San Lorenzo area, *with whom we have had no contact since the uprising began.* It is decided that the Proletaries dynamite the bridge, but we find we have no explosives. The entire night is spent fortifying barricades.

“*Wednesday, 13 September*

p “Barricades are up virtually all over the San Lorenzo district.

p “A commando has been recruited to prevent all attempts at robbery and looting. Sentinels are posted at food stores. National Guardsmen surround *a Tercerista-led group.* We rush to their succour, and repulse a National Guard attack.

“At mid-day *we confer with tlie three Terceristas responsible for the zone*. Representatives of the three factions confer to size up available forces to attack the National Guard.

“*Thursday, 14 September*

“*A three-man leadership representing each faction is set up* to plan the garrison’s capture. Another similar three-man group is charged to contact the anarchists and agree on joint action in this operation. It is agreed that our base will be the focal point for conferences of representatives of the three factions.

“*Friday, 15 September*

p “*We organised armed groups in the blocks under our control*, We handle communication matters and *are now in 74 a position to communicate by radio-telephone with the leadership of each of the three factions*.

“The enemy mounts an assault along the riverside. We entrench in the Rosario district, where we link with a Proletaries group forced to retreat from a section they had hitherto held.

“*Saturday, 16 September*

p “Plans to capture the garrison fall through. Our forces fail to reach the point from which we are to attack the garrison. The enemy calls in the air force.

p “*Terceristas are not in our section and we know nothing about them*. Our forces now consist of two, GPP and Proletaries, units. According to available information, the enemy has suppressed the uprising in other cities and towns and is moving forces here, to Ghinandega. We are compelled to switch to defensive operations.

p “At mid-day, *after conferring with the Proletaries*, we decide to escape investment and move out of the city to preserve strength.”

p The above-quoted excerpts from the log published in the *Trinchera* largely reveal why the Sandinistas failed to topple the Somoza dictatorship in September 1978.

p The Sandinistas struck at the National Guard, in a figure of speech, with a hand whose fingers were spread out. There was no coordination or agreement at all between the different factions. At the outset, the factions were not even in contact with one another. As was said, "One of our groups contacts Terceristas leaders”, or "One of our comrades agreed with the Proletaries on joint action’^^1^^ or "Agreement was reached to confer to draft joint action . . . but no agreed decision was reached”. Note that all these attempts at contact and coordination came not *before* the uprising began, but when it was *in full swing*, when fighting was at its height.

p Note that in Ghinandega, only on 14 September was a "three-man leadership representing each faction set up to plan the garrison's capture". Time had been lost and a " threeman leadership representing the three factions" could in 75 practice get nowhere in the space of the two days left of the fighting.

p The man writing the log represents the GPP, the newspalper publishing it is also the organ of the GPP, and he keeps saying "our men", or "our comrades", or "we attack".

p Hence, when the call rang out to back the spontaneous popular uprising, the Sandinistas were divided into three *autonomous* factions, each with its own armed groups totally *disconnected*. Thus, in Chinandega, all three factions had their own leaders, who did not know how many groups the other factions had and how well armed they were.

p Then, the uprising was spontaneous. The Sandinistas had not organised it, had not planned it to occur in September 1978. However in a *fait accompli* situation, the Sandinistas took the only right decision, exhorting the people to rise up and try to carry out the first part of the programme, that is, topple the Somoza dictatorship, terminate National Guard outrages, and prevent the installation of a Somoza-type government after Somoza had gone.

They failed to carry out these plans in September 1978, partly for reason of what is said above, but mostly because of the backing of circles in the United States, thanks to whom the Somoza clan ruled Nicaragua for so long.

CHAPTER SEVEN
WHO WANTS TO KEEP SOMOZA GOING, AND HOW

p Analysing the lessons of the September uprising, the Sandinista National Liberation Front declared in a communique issued on 17 October 1978, "We accuse of complicity in this bloodbath (meant is the punitive extermination of the population during and after the uprising—*Auth.*) the arch–reactionaries among the military in El Salvador and Guatemala, who at once sent aircraft and more than 500 men to Nicaragua to help the dictator exterminate our people. Yet a still greater measure of blame devolves upon the reactionary circles in the US Administration who created and nurtured the Somoza dynasty and its criminal National Guard.... In this war, the napalm and the phosphorous and block-buster bombs which the US Administration gave Somoza were dropped from aircraft which again the US Administration had given Somoza, and which were piloted by Americans and Nicaraguans trained at US military bases."

p We follow with two more excerpts, one from the article "In the Bunker" in *Newsweek's* New Year issue, according to which Nicaraguans say the Carter Administration was silent when National Guardsmen killed 3,000 in suppressing the September uprising (it wasn't 3,000, but more than 5,000 civilians—*Auth.*), but was quick to offer mediation when realising how popular the Sandinistas were. In short, " Washington has apparently decided that the Sandinistas must be stopped. Towaids that end, Ambassador William Bowdler, chief US negotiator in Nicaragua, traveled early last month 77 to Costa Rica and Panama, two nations that have given overt support to the guerillas. Acoidmg to one high government official, Bowdler's message to officials in both countries was 'heavy-handed and accompanied by hints of possible American sanctions if not obeyed'."

p However, moderate and Left-wing oppositionists reportedly believe that Washington, afraid of "another Cuba", prefers stability to social and economic change, or even human rights and is repeating the US policy of 1912–33 Nicaraguan occupation followed by support for the Somoza family.

p The third excerpt is from the Costa Rican weekly *La Verdad* dated 8 October 1978, quoting Eden Pastora (Comandante Cero) to the effect that one Raymond Molina, a Cuban counter-revolutionary, had opened in Miami, the USA, an office to recruit mercenaries, who, according to Pastora, piloted the aircraft that bombed insurgent Nicaraguan cities in September. He also claimed that active in the country were military from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, and fugitive Van Thieu ex-soldiers from Vietnam.

p Mentioned in these three passages are "the reactionary circles in the US Administration", Washington, which had "decided that the Sandinistas must be stopped", and a seemingly private individual, a certain Raymond Molina, who had opened in Miami an office to recruit mercenaries. These were not at all a motley (assemblage of forces, each doing its own thing. Closer scrutiny reveals that the US ruling circles

coordinated the efforts of all seeking at all costs to bar the establishment of a democratic government in Nicaragua. Evidence follows:

p The Florida *Tampa Tribune* in a report of 18 June 1977 about the Nicaraguan Congressional lobby, said that "Molina, a Miami resident, is one of the names listed on a lobby registration statement filed by the American-Nicaraguan Council with the House Clerk's Office June 3. The organisation said it was formally known as Citizens for the Truth About Nicaragua and listed as its address 475 L'Enfant Plaza, S. W., Suite 4100, the address of Cramer's law firm".

p Who on earth is Cramer? On 16 June 1977, the *Tampa Tribune* reported that the Washington law firm of Cramer, 78 Haber, and Becker is paid annually $100,000 to counsel the Republican National Committee, and that Cramer often plans its procedures and strategy. "Cramer's Washington law firm registered as a foreign agent for the Nicaraguan government last week and said it expects to be paid $50,000 in fees and expenses for the lobbying efforts . . . This is in addition to the $57,000 in fees paid ... by the Institute de Fomento Nacional, the joint government-private Nicaraguan economic development agency.... William C. Cramer of St. Petersburg . .. has been active in behind-the-scenes lobbying to obtain $3 million military aid to Nicaragua—a country accused by two Congressional committees of using its National Guard to beat and torture civilians."

p In the last Congress, Young replaced Cramer as Representative from Florida. Again the *Tampa Tribune* on 19 June 1977 says of Young, "Young replaced Cramer in Congress.... They were part of the so-called ICY political machine in Pinellas County, named for the initials of Cramer aide Jack Insco, Cramer, and Young. . .."

p In a vote on military aid to Somoza, two Florida Representatives, Bill Young and Bill Chappell, cast their votes for it. We thus come the full circle from Raymond Molina, to William Cramer, to Bill Young. Birds of a feather.

p Some Congressmen yielded to the Nicaraguan lobby, others of their own accord voted in 1977 for military aid to Nicaragua, as a result of which Somoza obtained $2.5 million for military hardware and another $600,000 to train the punitive National Guard.

p To provide a notion of the arguments adduced to assign for Nicaragua the American tax-payers' money, allow me to quote from the stenographic record and more specifically, from a speech made by Congressman Rudd:

p "Mr. Chairman, I support this amendment to restore the $3.1 million in military assistance to the pro-American Government of Nicaragua. I suggest *ive do what is best for the United States of America*. (My emphasis here and further.—*Auth.*).

p ". . .The United States has a moral obligation *to assist* the friendly Nicaraguan Government *with military aid in order to 79 maintain stability and freedom in that country*, a stability desperately needed.

p “Nicaragua’s President Anastasio Somoza *is an educated man who was trained at West Point*.

p “*He is pro-American*, and stands out clearly as a man for stability and against blood-thirsty terrorists. *He deserves* our Government’s *continued support—to protect his people and his country’s free institutions*. . . .

p “Why unnecessarily kick a friendly government in the teeth by denying Nicaragua $3.1 million of needed military assistance?

p ”. . .Leftists have, therefore, mounted a massive propaganda campaign against Nicaragua on the human rights theme to achieve this objective.

p “During the committee hearings about alleged human rights violations in Nicaragua, I am not aware of a single witness who gave credible firsthand evidence of such violations. . . .

p “These reports have been thirdhand accounts taken without verification.”

p What "thirdhand accounts" did this venerable lobbyist for the Somoza dictatorship have in mind? Here is but one, an excerpt from a *Washington Post* story of 13 June 1977:

p “More than 200 peasants have been killed in Nicaragua’s northern jungles in a ’reign of terror and unjust extermination’, according to the country’s Catholic bishops.

p “Most of the victims, including women and children, were killed by Nicaragua’s National Guard, which doubles as army and police following charges of collaboration with a guerilla band of 50 leftist university students operating in the area around the *Valslala River* in the western part of the department of Zelaya, the bishops say.

p “Zelaya’s priests, schoolteachers, peasants, and even some local sheriffs say s that the collaboration charges are a pretext to seize the peasants’ land and other spoils of war including cattle and household goods, and to rape peasant women. Capuchi friars from the US who are in charge of the Vicariate of Zelaya report that 26 rural chapels have been converted into barracks and torture centres by the National Guard. . . .

p ”. . .After congressional hearings on the reported abuses by the Nicaraguan National Guard the State Department announced that it would withhold military assistance funds for 1977. The Department asked for a 1978 appropriation, however, in case the situation improves. In 1975 the National Guard received $1 million worth of anus and training assistance from the United States. . . .

p ”. . .A January pastoral letter by Nicaragua’s Catholic bishops denounced ’arbitrary detentions, torture, rape and executions without previous trial’ in the northern jungles,

which include much of Zelaya, and Matagalpa. The letter emphasised 'the increasing concentration of land and wealth at the expense of humble peasants who have been disposessed of their fields'. . . .

p ". . .The process already is well advanced, with 1,800 ranches occupying 50 percent of Nicaragua's cultivated land, while 96,000 small farms occupy the rest. *President Anastasio Somoza and his family* own 8,260 square miles, an area approximately the size of nearby El Salvador. . . .

p ". . .Whole districts have been wiped out by the National Guard on the pretext of guerilla collaboration, yet there was no evidence of any support for the guerillas, said another source, adding that in several cases the land of murdered peasants was redistributed among the National Guard or turned over to the large ranchers.

p "According to informed sources, some 1,200 acres along the *Jyas River* in the *Sofana* district of Western Zelaya were ceded to the local military chief, Col. Gonzalo Everts, last year, after the National Guard shot 40 Sofana peasants, including the family who owned the land.

p "Everts' successor, Col. Gustavo Medina, recently authorised the takeover of lands south of the Dudu River by a large cattle rancher with adjacent holdings along the MatagalpaZelaya frontier, informed sources said. Of the 100 peasant families living on these lands, only 18 are left, the rest having fled or 'disappeared', meaning they were probably shot by the military.

p "Sources who know the area well said a similar pocess has occurred in the nearby Varilla district, where 44 men, 81 women, and children were killed by the military in January, after the local sheriff accused the head of the Gonzalez family of collaborating with the guerillas. Although there was no evidence to support the sheriff's charge, the National Guard slaughtered the entire Gonzalez family, their married daughters and their families, including 29 children, burying the bodies in a common pit, the sources said."

But for Congressman Rudd these facts are "thirdhand accounts", and therefore devoid of credibility. As all will clearly realise that it is impossible to get firsthand testimony, that is, from peasants slain by Somoza's punitive squads, allow me now to quote the testimony of a man who escaped death by a fluke after being captured by National Guardsmen. His testimony was taped in San Jose, capital of Costa Rica, on 3 February 1979.

The Testimony of Marcel Morales Velasquez

p "I used to live in the Department of Carazo in Jinotepe. My mother is a housewife, my father, a social security clerk. I shall now tell you what happened to me in 1978. Like all my friends, I was interested in politics, wanting to understand what was going on in the country and how we ought to live. Early last year, I took part in the occupation of our educational establishment, and had my first whiff of gunpowder, as the National Guard

fired upon us. I was a member of the Secondary School Association and head of the school students in the San Iglesias area. I lost my right arm on 9 July last year, when a bomb, a home-made contact bomb, blew up in my hand. I was to carry it to a certain place, but was pursued by National Guardsmen. As a matter of fact, I was making for a meeting, an undercover meeting of school students. At any rate, the National Guardsmen chased me simply because they saw a young man all by himself in the street at seven o'clock in the evening, when it was already dark. One couldn't go out of doors at the time because of the curfew. I pulled the bomb out of my pocket wanting to throw it at the National Guardsmen, but accidentally touched a wall, and it exploded in my hand. The Guardsmen ran off, 82 and I was picked up by strangers and secretly attended to by a doctor.

p "After fifteen days, to let the stump of my arm heal, I decided to leave the place as I was a hunted peison who had exploded a bomb he had wanted to throw at the National Guard. Coming to the hovel where my friend and his family lived, I was detained by National Guardsmen. I have been in five prisons, five different jails, at first in Monte Limar, then in Via Carmen, in San Juan del Sur, in Campot del Mar, and finally in La Central. They are crammed with political prisoners. In four of the prisons I was tortured. At first I was simply beaten up for long and most painfully. Then a sergeant, a butcher whose name is Machanero, tortured me with electricity. He stuck electric wires into my ears and switched on the curent. Then he wrapped a live wire around the stump of my arm and passed electricity through it. I was told I would be transferred to the Modelo Jail, the so-called model prison, but my father asked a friend of his, who had a captain for his friend, to help to get me off. Father paid a 10,000 cordobas fine and I was released. I was let out, of course, to be arrested again at once. But I went to earth and a little later was told that they were hunting for me high and low. Incidentally, father receives a monthly salary of only 5,000 cordobas, and he had to mortgage our cottage to scrape together the money, a bribe which was pocketed by the jailers. A little later, I was smuggled out into Costa Rica. I was a high school student. I had completed primary school and was in the second form at high school. When the National Guardsmen seized me and tortured me I was 13. Now I'm 14.

p "I'd also like to tell you about a chum of mine, Alvaro Sanchez by name. In broad daylight in Managua, at one o'clock in the afternoon, he was detained by National Guard patrol and deposited in the Managua jail, where he was tortured and then riddled with bullets, 52 altogether. At five o'clock in the afternoon, National Guardsmen brought his body home. The name of one of the torturers is Washington. This harassment of our students began after we had organised school and student organisations and Somoza's National Guard 83 learned that we were all Sandinistas, that we all sympathised with and supported the Sandinista National Liberation Front. That is why they subjected us to such brutal torture and persecuted us in every way possible and wherever possible.

p "There are today some 900 membeis of our school and student oigamsations in SOIIIOZA jails. In so small a country as ours 900 school and college students alone have been arrested by Somoza's hangmen."

p US Representative John Murphy, mentioned earlier in this book, a close friend and staunch advocate of Somoza, speaking in Congress on 21 July 1977, thus worded his arguments for 1978 aid:

p ". . .The strong identity of the United States with Nicaragua is characterised in a State Department report on political issues:

p "Nicaraguan foreign policy stresses the maintenance of the closest possible ties with the United States. Nicaragua voted with the US in the last UN General Assembly on the antiZionism resolution, on Korea, and on the decolonisation resolutions. The Government of Nicaragua is increasingly nervous about a potential threat fiom Cuba, particularly after Angola, and this reinforces the impulse to identify with the US.

p ". .Look at the support Nicaragua has given us... especially when compared to communist-dominated (*sic!*) Costa Rica. A partial listing . . . will give us an indication of the kind of courage this government. . . has.

p "First. *Terrorism*: Nicaragua has always supported and worked hand in hand with the United States in the common cause against international terrorism and has opposed the Soviet bloc on this issue.

p "Second. *The Expulsion of Nationalist China*: Nicaragua is the only Latin American country that supported the position of the United States to avoid the expulsion of China from the United Nations. Costa Rica refused to support the United States.

p "Third. *Israel*: Whenever the United States asks Nicaragua to speak in defence of an Israel position in the United 84 Nations . . . the Nicaraguan delegation has supported Israel's position. . . .

p "Fourth. *Disarmament*: At the request of the United States delegation, Nicaragua has taken the floor and argued against the USSR and for the American position on disarmament.

p "Fifth. *South Korea*: At the request of the United States,—Nicaragua co-sponsored the US-backed Korean peace plan.

p "Sixth. *Puerto Rico*: Whenever Cuba has presented draft resolutions in different committees and the General Assembly calling for Puerto Rican independence, Nicaragua has supported the United States.

p "Seventh. *Cuba*: Whenever the Cuban delegation has insulted the US government and/or their President, for example, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Nicaragua has taken the floor in defence of the United States and its several administrations.

p "Eighth. *In the Security Council*: Nicaragua has consistently supported the different motions presented by the United States.

p “Ninth. Nicaragua was one of the two Latin American countries that supported *the US military base* in Iceland. Costa Rica voted against it.

p “Tenth. *Cuba*: Nicaragua voted with the United States against lifting the OAS ban on Cuba. Costa Rica was in favour.”

p Such was the attitude of US reaction prior to Nicaragua’s September uprising, and it did not change after Somoza managed to stay in the saddle.

p On 19 September 1978 the *Wall Street Journal*, mouthpiece of the US business world, noted:

p ”. . .Like it or not, the US is unalterably intertwined with this remote land of earthquakes, volcanoes, gambling casinos and cockfights. We established the National Guard, trained it and gave it guns. We educated Gen. Somoza at West Point and discouraged his political opponents because he offered stability. We launched the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba from here. The picture of a recent US ambassador adorns Nicaraguan paper money and there were even widespread rumors once that the late billionaire Howard Hughes—who lived atop 85 the pyramid-shaped Hotel Intercontinental Managua for a spell—planned to buy the country from ’Tacho’, whose family has carefully groomed Nicaragua into a sort of family heirloom.”

p Aware that Somoza would evidently not be able to hold on for long, Washington back in September 1978 embarked upon a policy of giving the country a "Somozaism without Somoza” facelift and entered into talks with representatives of the Broad Opposition Front.

p These ruses were nailed not only by genuinely progressive Nicaraguan oppositionists. Furiously assailing everyone who seemed in their eyes to be attacking the dictatorship, Right-wing extremist American Congressmen, especially the notorious Somoza-paid John Murphy, unwittingly blurted out plans devised by different US services, including the State Department. There follow extracts from the Congressional Record of Murphy’s 21 September 1978 speech:

p “This so-called group of eleven of pro-terrorist politicians which is the political front for the FSLN, has also been promoted by the State Department activists as an alleged ’Third Force’ in Nicaragua, a ’Third Force’ of Las Doces and UDEL, now the FAO, (the Democratic Union of Liberation created in December 1974—*Auth.*) to offer a ’moderate’ alternative to the traditionally anti-communist, pro-American centralised government headed by President Somoza and to a possible military coup by the Nicaraguan National Guard.

p “This ’Third Force’ method of finding some ’alternative’ of existing governments friendly to the United States has been the State Department’s main tactic for attacking American allies since the early 1950s. As usual, the Nicaraguan ’Third Force’ is an ally not of the Free World, but of the Communists, and ends up playing the role of a ’front

man’ for a Communist takeover. R. Harris Smith wrote in his book, ’OSS: The Secret History of America’s First Central Intelligence Agency’, that the most ’notorious failure of the "Third Force" theory was in Cuba where Fidel Castor’s 26th of July Movement played that role. . . .’

p ”. . .This open hostility of the US government towards the Nicaraguan government is a matter of public record. One 86 of its leading architects is Mauricio Solaun, the US Ambassador to Nicaragua. Ambassador Solaun will be remembered for his sensational ’confirmation’ of false press reports that US mercenaries were serving in a combat capacity with the Nicaraguan National Guard. . . .

p “But Ambassador Solaun has done much more. Another of his projects was to work with the Nicaraguan opposition group, the Democratic Union of Liberation (UDEL) and pursuade President Somoza to engage in a political dialogue, in other words, to make concessions to the group.”

p John Murphy also said that the US had friendly relations of cooperation with Nicaragua, that there were no disputes between the two countries, that Nicaragua supported the USA and pursued its line on major international issues, and that as far as Nicaragua was concerned, the USA had a stake in having it continue that line and wanted to help its government. Here Murphy was putting his best foot forward to defend his pal Somoza, and was going against the State Department, which sought to retain a US hold in Nicaragua, even to the extent of sacrificing Somoza to that end, but without scrapping the existing economic and political setup. In other words, the State Department prefered to have "Somozaism without Somoza”, and was amenable to sacrificing the dictator—against which Murphy was dead-set.

p However, imperialist designs for "Somozaism without Somoza" in Nicaragua were promptly nailed. In protest against backstage manoeuvring to install a government in which the Sandinistas would not be represented, the most influential Group of 12 and several other democratic organisations withdrew from the Broad Opposition Front (FAO).

p FSLN leader Miguel Castafieda told me how US imperialism’s designs failed.

p “What they wanted to do,” he said, "was to get conciliators break with the opposition forces and agree to preserve in a revised form the dictatorship that the people wanted to throw out, in other words, what the whole world now calls ’Somozaism without Somoza’. Keeping intact the economic setup that had existed under the dictatorship, they intended to jettison Somoza and, reaching agreement with the 87 reactionary wing of the national bourgeoisie, suppress the popular movement. At this juncture, the FSLN repeated time and again that the fight would go on, were there to be ’Somozaism without Somoza’. We shall stop fighting only when the people decide the lot of their country for themselves. In this situation, progressives in the FAO, in which mainly represented is the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, seeing through the stratagems of imperialism’s agents, refused to have any part in this farce, and withdrew from the FAO. First to do that was the Group of 12, who

exposed the ruses of North American imperialism. There also walked out the National Confederation of the Workers of Nicaragua and several other organisations. All these forces agreed with the FSLN to form the National Patriotic Front."

At a conference in early February 1979, the Communist and Workes' Parties of Central America, Mexico, and Cuba discussed Nicaragua and published a communique stating in part: "We believe it vital to constantly fuel worldwide solidarity with Nicaraguan patriots and energetically expose imperialist manoeuvres to weaken and spike the popular movement by ousting Somoza, but keeping intact that regime of violence and exploitation which exists due to Somoza's National Guard, the Nationalist Liberal Party, and the Somoza clan's undivided economic sway. The main vehicle there is the OAS, which heeding the dictation of North American imperialism and in collusion with arch-reactionaries among the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie, tried to get the heroic people of Nicaragua effect conciliation with the dictatorship through 'dialogue, mediation, and negotiation'. The soundest patriotic forces of Nicargua's people have spurned and spiked these imperialist manoeuvres."

CHAPTER EIGHT
TILL VICTORY!

p On 2 February 1979, Nicaragua's patriotic forces organised in Managua the National Patriotic Front, the NPF. That same day I interviewed NPF General Coordinator Sergio Ramirez, who stated:

p "The organisation of the NPF was suggested by our Group of 12 back in October 1977, when we created this group and discussed two basic options for the people of Nicaragua.

p "The first was to give every assistance to the FSLN. This was the first time a group of people in so prominent a position as we appealed to the people to support a guerilla movement.

p "The second option was to organise a united patriotic antiSomoza front. However, this did not succeed as planned. In May 1978 only the Broad Opposition Front (FAO) was organised, and on 5 July we joined it. Outside of FAO there came into being the MPU, the United People's Movement, which brought together different Left-wing trends, including FSLN factions.

p "We joined the FAO believing that in it we would be able to discharge a positive mission. And that was really so. When the popular uprising erupted, we as a political group were in a position to analyse the actions of the two opposition movements of the FAO and MPU. During the September general strike and September armed uprising, we very successfully united all opposition forces to a degree unprecedented in Nicaragua.

p "However this unity began to splinter in October because of imperialist 'mediation', because the only purpose of US 'mediation' via OAS was to fragment opposition unity and militarily and politically consolidate the Somoza regime. On 25 October we decided to withdraw from 'mediation' talks, and exposed this mediation as a vehicle for foreign intervention, whose sole aim was to bolster up Somoza or install 'Somozaism without Somoza'. In short, Somoza as a person was no longer of interest to the USA and imperialism, and could be jettisoned but on the other hand it was vital to preserve his system. To this day the USA still schemes to consolidate the Somozaist system, which relies on the National Guard, the National Congress, the bureaucracy, and of course, the untold wealth which the Somoza dynasty has looted and has available.

p "Thus, when starting to organise in December 1978 a democratic front, we distinctly realised that it must be antiinterventionist. We saw it as free of all foreign influence, and as relying on Nicaraguan democrats, on united democratic forces representing every segment of the population. In our view, it was to incorporate the MPU and other opposition forces that had walked out of the FAO.

p “In the NPF we shall advocate a three-plank programme seeking the effective democratisation of Nicaragua. The three basic planks are nationalism, democracy, and social progress.

p “These three planks are the foundation of a 22-point programme, primarily to completely expropriate all properties of the Somoza dynasty, democratise the army, dissolve the National Congress, nationalise such natural wealth as coal, gas, fisheries, timber, and mines, nationalise the transport system, and effect a genuine agrarian reform. This programme is democratic and paves the way for a transition government acceptable to all democrats, including the national bourgeoisie. It has the support, one may say, of all segments of the population, from the FSLN to petty–bourgeois and industrialist groups. We hope democratic forces still outside of FAO will take this programme as the groundwork to join the NPF, unite and thus spike imperialist ‘89 mediation’ stratagems, which imperialism has still no intentions of abandoning, and still hopes to actively promote.

p “There is no question that the Nicaraguan people are Sandinista in outlook. The Sandinistas are mostly young people, numerically the biggest category in our country, as 70 percent of the population are under 25. It is the younger generation who have borne the brunt of the revolutionary movement.

p “We are aware that it is vital to dedicate every effort to secure full unity. Somozaism will be defeated only if the country’s democratic forces unite.

p “That we still have two opposition movements in Nicaragua today is not our fault. It is consequential upon US intervention. One must be fully aware of that, as imperialist propaganda is trying to hoodwink the world into believing that the only way out of the crisis is through FAO and thus promote its ’mediation’ plan, oblivious of the FSLN as the truly real force. The USA seeks to ignore the Sandinistas as a political and military force. Which is absolutely unreal, which borders on the absurd.

p “The FSLN has today a general programme for unification. The Sandinistas are striving for overall unity, while consolidating their own unity. This is a point that must be emphasised.

p “The NPF will incorporate many labour organisations, whether led by Communists or by Sandinistas.

p “Sensing that the end is near, Somoza wants to internationalise the Nicaraguan conflict, and implicate other Central American countries. The USA also wants this, realising that an explosive situation exists in Central America Suffice it to take such other countries as Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. If the Nicaraguan conflict sweeps across national frontiers, uprisings may also flare up in those countries and jeopardise their dictatorships.

p “Naturally, Somoza will now be given financial shots in the arm and sundry other assistance to keep him in power. Somoza’s situation may be compared to that of a

helplessly sick man who is given more and more injections, but without any guarantee of recovery. There comes a day 91 when injections no longer have effect. The same could be said of Somoza.

p “It must be re-emphasised that the USA has a stake in Somoza and Somozaism, and that Somoza himself, naturally, wants to keep going. Nicaragua’s economy is now virtually disrupted and the treasury is empty, but Somoza cares not a tittle for that, as his chief interest is his own wealth, his personal fortune, that of his family, all his loot. He has the National Guard, a big bodyguard, cars, and helicopters, and wants to keep all that. But what the USA wants is to keep the Somoza system going. It is no longer interested in Somoza as such. And so one sees a contradiction between the present system in Nicaragua and Somoza, who represents that system.

p “Let me repeat that what the USA wants is the system, not Somoza, but we want to rid the country of both Somoza and the system. All democratic forces joining the NPF organised today will strive to accomplish this, to abolish both the system and Somoza.”

p On 7 March 1979 there occurred in the Sandinista movement an event that will unquestionably be most instrumental in the struggle against Somoza. Its three factions signed an agreement to establish unity in the FSLN. For the Terceristas the agreement was signed by Daniel Ortega, Victor Tirado, and Humberto Ortega, for the GPP by Henry Ruiz, Tomas Borge, and Bayardo Arce, and for the Proletaries by Luis Carrion, Jaime Wheelock, and Carlos Nunez. These nine men make up the FSLN United National Directorate.

p The related communique published states that "from the moment the present agreements are signed, the United National Directorate will act as the supreme body of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)”. Henceforth, only this body may "sign official documents, communiques, etc., and nationally and internationally politically represent the Sandinista National Liberation Front".

p Among its functions will be "according as the movement advances to define the military and political strategy of the Sandinista movement, to direct the FSLN’s full 92 reunification, and create military and political organisations to carry out revolutionary tasks".

p As for the military setup, the related agreement says that every effort be taken to preserve and consolidate the three existing fronts—the Carlos Fonseca Northern Front, the Pablo Ubeda Northeastern Front, and the Benjamin Zeledon Southern Front, that another Roberto Huembes Front be created, and that several measures be taken to consolidate the Internal Front.

p In mid-March, Sandinistas conducted successful military operations in Matagalpa, Esteli, Chinandega, and several other cities and towns. On 18 March several coordinated guerilla assaults were mounted on National Guard posts in Managua. On 30 March in the

Jicaro District, guerillas ambushed a National Guard force, killing 49 and wounding 60 officers and men.

p In late March the FSLN National Directorate issued a statement for Latin America noting that complete organisational unity had been achieved through the full integration of the three—GPP, Terceristas, and Proletaries—-factions under one leadership, which had worked out an overall strategic programme of action.

p On 21 February, the anniversary of Augusto Sandino's tragic death, Sandinistas carried out the sentence on retired Colonel Federico Davidson Blanco, who exactly 45 years earlier had as a lieutenant been directly involved in Sandino's assassination. According to Reuter, this took place in Matagalpa.

p In early 1979 Somoza frantically clung to power. On 26 February *Newsweek* noted under the heading, " Showdown in Nicaragua", that "Somoza has built up the National Guard from about 7,000 men in September to its current level of 12,000, and hopes to have 15,000 soon. His forces include a crack 2,000-man battalion whose barracks adjoin the Presidential bunker. Nicknamed Somoza's ' Waffen-SS', the unit shouts, "Kill! Kill! Kill!' and 'Up with the Guardia, down with the people!' ".

p As you may know, in command of the "Waffen-SS" is Somoza Jr., 27-year-old Anastasio Somoza Portocarerro. This 93 year in his Tiscapa bunker, the dictator signed an order promoting his son to Lieutenant Colonel. Karen De Young of the *Washington Post* wrote from Managua that Somoza was manoeuvring to have his family control the National Guard, should he resign as President.

p On 13 March it was reported from Washington that the US-controlled International Monetary Fund had agreed to grant Somoza a $40,000 million loan.

At a news conference, Ernesto Cardenal claimed the CIA had worked out a plan envisaging the bodily extermination of FSLN and radical opposition leaders, and the suppression of guerrillas and popular action by CONDECA (Central American Defence Council) forces, and that if the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie would not agree to Somoza's remaining in power, he would be replaced by a more suitable figure, who could guarantee US interests in the country.

CHAPTER NINE
GIRDING FOR THE SECOND OFFENSIVE

(A. Chronicle)

p As soon as the NPF and a unified FSLN command and directorate were formed, the patriots began to gird themselves for a second decisive offensive against the dictatorship.

p Opposition tactics were to give Somoza not the slightest respite, to seize every opportunity, even the slightest, to organise working class action, whether on a nationwide scale, or within the limitations of one tiny urban community. Every method was used, from armed assault to strikes. Great heed was paid to explaining to the world the aims and tasks of the anti-Somoza movement to stir up poweiful worldwide suppoit for the people of Nicaragua.

The chronicle of events between April and July 1979 traces further developments, reactionary support for Somoza, and world response to the situation in Nicaragua.

1 to 10 April

At the beginning of April, Nicaraguan oppositionists declared that according to available information, US Pentagon circles were interested in staging a military takeover in Nicaragua, which ousting Somoza would preserve the existing system intact. Which meant that the aim of the plot was to keep "Somozaism without Somoza". In its 3 April issue, the Buenos Aires newspaper *Informe* reported, "A group of (Nicaraguan) military are feverishly preparing for a coup in collusion with the CIA. Named among these 95 officers are Major Franklin Montero, General Julio Gutierrez, Somoza's envoy to Washington, General Gustavo Montiel, ex-Minister of Finance, and General Guillermo Noguela, Chief of Geneial Staff".

2 April

p In a Piensa Latina interview, Jose Maria Zelaya, Nicaragua's former UN Ambassador who resigned in protest against Somoza genocide, declared that Somoza's resignation and the installation of a Provisional Revolutionary Government provided the only acceptable alternative in the present situation in Nicaragua. Of US policy vis-a-vis Nicaragua, the Ambassador said its purpose was to maintain US interests there.

Reports from Managua say that over the past 24 hours, there have been armed clashes between National Guardsmen and Sandinistas in various parts of the country. In the Nueva Segovia Department, on the border with Honduras, Sandinistas killed National Guard officer Julio Salvador Pereira, and in Esteli attacked a National Guard patrol. Leon

was also scene of fighting. In Managua Sandinistas occupied the National University for several hours, and seized ten firearms.

4 April

p It is announced in Managua that Somoza and his family plan to leave on “holiday”. According to the official comunique, leaving with Somoza are his mother, Salvadora de Bayle, and his son Lt. Col. Anastasio Portocarrero. It is not said for how long he is going or where. Nor is anything said as to whether Somoza’s brother Jose will still command the National Guard.

Some 10,000 college and high-school students stage a one-day strike, demanding an end to repression and the release of all political prisoners.

6 April

p In Washington a State Department spokesman says that on Saturday, 7 April Nicaraguan President Anastasio 96 Somoza will be "privately visiting" the USA for several days, but will not come to Washington, as he will be "down South”, most likely in Texas.

p In a France Presse interview, Venezuela’s Nicaraguan Solidarity Committee says that according to information from sources connected with the Sandinistas, US-backed Right-wing extremists in Nicaragua will attempt over the next week a coup to set up a military-civilian junta to enable Somoza run for the 1981 Presidential elections there. General Julio Gutierrez, the Nicaraguan military attache in Washington, and Somoza’s brother-in-law are named among the main plotters.

p Incidentally, in the past few days there have been a plethora of reports about coups in the making, all to oust Somoza and install a less odious figure for Nicaraguans who would be acceptable to the USA. Such "leaked information" must be treated with great caution, as much has been fabricated by Washington’s special services in the hope that such rumours will serve to split the opposition, and create illusions as to the likely abolition of the dictatorship through negotiation.

p In Costa Rica, Colombian author Gabriel Garcia Marquez declares, "Somoza’s days are numbered. There is no doubt that the people will soon end the much-hated dictatorship that has been oppressing it for more than forty years.”

The National Guard counter-attacks patriots holding Esteli, but is repulsed. Sandinistas kill 25 enemy soldiers, shoot down one plane, an Israeli-made Push-Pull, and put out of commission a Sherman tank and a whippet tank. In the past three days, Sandinistas have shot down four Somoza aircraft in the Esteli neighbourhood.

14 April

p After six days Sandinistas withdraw from Esteli into the mountains. Enemy casualties include 120 officers and men killed. Much military hardware has been captured and four aircraft and two tanks have been put out of commission. The entire operation has shown that Sandinista forces 97 can successfully capture urban areas and that the organisation of a unified command is yielding positive results.

Upon entering Esteli, Somoza's soldiery massacre many inhabitants, including surgeons Alejandro Davila Bolanos and Eduardo Selva while operating at the municipal hospital.

17 April

p Somoza forms a special commando to "kill National Guardsmen attempting to desert". Appointed its commanding officer is the notorious hangman and torturer Julio Moya, an officer of the Nicaraguan National Security Service.

p In Nueva Segovia in the North a National Guard patrol under Lt. Ali Gonzalez defects to the Sandinistas with all their weapons.

In Leon Oscar Perez Casar Pereira, head of the military political commission of the FSLN Internal Front, and another five Sandinistas, including Mexican sociologist Araceli Perez Darias, daughter of a big Mexican industrialist, are captured and brutally murdered by National Guardsmen. Somoza announces the extermination of Commandante Dos, Dora Maria Tellez, who participated in the August 1978 operation to seize the National Palace. However, the Sandinista leadership says she is still in command of Sandinista column.

20 April

***From Monitored Radio Sandino Broadcasts*:**

p "In a clash between Sandinistas and National Guardsmen in Open Tres, Managua, enemy casualties number eight, while two Sandinista comrades are killed."

p "Workers of a Managua district struck yesterday for higher pay. They are supported by all labour organisations in the industry and their strike is coordinated by the NPF."

p "The Managua Radio Reporters Association meets at the Radio Corporation to protest Somoza misinformation."

p The above-quoted news items show that though there is no major action against the dictatorship, the situation is still tense.

98

UPI reports that Sandinista guerrillas and government forces fought a battle yesterday in Southern Nicaragua near the Costa Rican border.

21 April

At a news conference in Managua, Nicaraguan millionaire industrialist Federico Lang says National Guardsmen killed in Leon his son, Edgard, dictator Anastasio Somoza's nephew, who joined the Sandinistas in 1976.

23 April

From Monitored Radio Sandino Broadcasts: "The NPF Trade Union Commission finalises initial preparations for a nationwide strike."

26 April

p Orestes Valera comments in the Cuban newspaper *Granma*: "Israeli military experts have been in Nicaragua for some time now. Zionist economic and military aid to Somoza has been exposed repeatedly. Tyrant Anastasio Somoza is using this and North American aid to practise genocide in Nicaragua."

p France Presse reports from Managua that "Israeli specialists are continuing to outfit a mobile anti-aircraft defence system for the Presidential Palace. Some five vehicles equipped with rocket launchers similar to those used to destroy aircraft by heat emission, have been deployed throughout the palace grounds.. .. The anti-aircraft system is armed with some 100 missiles".

p According to information from Washington, four members of the North American Coalition for Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua, one of them a nun, occupy for several hours International Monetary Fund premises in protest against IMF plans to grant Somoza a $40 million loan. All four are arrested by the police.

In Nicaragua NPF and FAO leaders continue talks started last week to discuss the political situation, and to coordinate measures to draft a common plan incorporating a nationwide strike as additional pressure to oust Somoza.

99

30 April

***Excerpts from a Declaration Issued by the Committee of Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua at a Meeting in Panama on 29–30 April*:**

p "The organising session of the Woild Conference of Solidaiity with the People of Nicaragua . . . attended by 51 delegates from 15 national and seven international organisations . . . expressing international public support to convene an international conference for solidarity with the people of Nicaragua to be held in Caracas, Venezuela, from 13 to 15 July . .. has concluded that it is the ... duty and obligation of all peoples, governments, parliaments, political organisations, and public figures throughout the

world to support this conference by establishing committees and national movements for it. ...

p “We, the undersigned, support the appeal of the World Conference for Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua, and pledge to work for its successful organisation, convinced that the struggle being waged in Sandino’s homeland will culminate in its full liberation. . . .

p “We pledge to promote the campaign and set up national committees in order to make the International Conference for Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua a truly effective instrument of aid to the patriotic forces of Nicaragua and a forum exposing the crimes of the Somoza regime.”

p The organising session was arranged by the National Council for the Defence of Sovereignty and Peace and Panama’s Nicaraguan Solidarity Committee under the aegis of the World Peace Council.

p *Excerpts from Monitored Radio Sandino Broadcasts*:

p “The International Monetary Fund (IMF) which is fully controlled by North American imperialism is about to grant Somoza a $44 million loan... . The Somoza dictatorship will use the money to indemnify debts and purchase arms with which to go on killing our people. This is all well known in the USA, which hypocritically talks of ’human rights’ and struts as champion of the free world.”

p It would be appropriate at this point to comment in greater detail on this Radio Sandino report, to indicate the USA’s true attitude to the dictatorship, and disclose Washington’s phaiisaical claptrap about the "high-minded motives" of its policy to defend "Nicaragua’s legitimate government" horn "pro-communist teirorists".

p The facts show US ruling circles have long treated and to this day treat Somoza as flunkey and hanger-on, well aware that they are dealing with an incorrigible thief, embezzler, bribe-taker, and murderer. However they tolerate him as he acts as a watch-dog protecting the interests of North American business, whose representatives reward him by giving him a free hand to plunder his people. As proof, allow me to quote excerpts from a 26 August 1976 *Washington Post* story, headed "US Subsidises Nicaragua’s Dictator":

p “A year ago, we named Anastasio Somoza, the barrelbellied dictator of Nicaragua, the world’s greediest ruler.

p “The sad truth is that the United States Government has provided the ladder for his ascent to this dubious pinnacle.

p “Somoza runs Nicaragua as if it were his private estate. Through his family and flunkeys, he owns or controls virtually every profitable industry, institution, and service in the country. . . . His enormous wealth has been squeezed out of his impoverished subjects, whose average pay is 30 cents an hour. They live in shacks and teeming slums, and eke out a living as best they can while the Big Banana stashes his millions in foreign banks.

p “The dictator ... leads his people to believe that any attempt to dislodge him would bring back the US marines, who have already occupied the country twice in this century.

p “Not only do American officials let him get away with this but they have subsidised the Somoza regime for 40 years with a steady flow of foreign aid. In the past 30 years the American tax-payers have donated over a quarter of a billion dollars to the tiny Central American republic.

p “The money was pumped into Nicaragua even though the US authorities knew all along they were dealing with 101 devils. From the moment the Somozas assumed power in Nicaragua, intelligence agencies and the State Department have kept detailed records of the family’s rampant corruption. . . .

p “Classified documents .. . reveal that the man who occupies the throne today, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, is a carbon copy of his father, Anastasio Somoza Garcia.

p “Here are some highlights:

p “In a ’Strictly Confidential’ cable dated April 11, 1939, the US Ambassador to Nicaragua Meredith Nicholson reported complaints of a ’continuing campaign of violence by the National Guard in the suppression of persons critical of the President’. His informants, wrote Nicholson, ’placed the figure of political deaths at the unbelievable total of a thousand a month’. If his sources were to be believed, said Nicholson, ’the country as a whole is one great political prison’. . . .

p ”. . . Another ’Strictly Confidential’ cable, dated the same month, carried a report by the US Charge d’Affaires Laverne Baldwin. . . .

p ”. . . In May, 1939, Somoza had made a state visit to Washington, where he was royally received by President Franklin Roosevelt. While on that trip, wrote Baldwin, Somoza received ’a total of $145,000 from the coffers of the state’. This, it must be remembered, was during a time of world depression. After his return from the US, cabled Baldwin. Somoza ’shamelessly exploited the prestige accruing from his reception there as representing assurances of direct support from the American government’.”

p Why did the powers-that-be in the USA pet so odious a person? Out of affection for dictatorships? Because of Somoza’s shared anti-communism? Out of the vainglorious desire to have their own flunkey as president of another country? Or out of political myopia? Though all these factors were unquestionably there, they were not the main

reasons. What has always been at the root of US policy vis–avis Nicaragua is the cash nexus. US policy makers care not a fig that Somoza is a plain criminal, who is shamelessly looting Nicaragua. What comes first with them is that the 102 Somozas give them a free hand also to loot Nicaragua and its people. The Somozas rob and let the US rob. This comes first for the USA, or rather, for those who shape US policy towards Nicaragua.

p In place of statistics on North American investment in Nicaragua and US company profits, I shall briefly quote from a quarter-page Somoza advertisement in the *New York Times* on 30 January 1977. It urged to invest in Nicaragua, as it "is a democracy run by a freely elected Government every six years. Its political stability combined with a very solid and stable economy, makes Nicaragua the ideal place for US investors to look into". Then comes an explanation of why the place is "ideal".

p "*Summary of investment information*.

p "a) Remittance of profits: No restriction.

p "b) Repatriation of capital: No restriction. Foreign investment law guarantees repatriation of registered foreign capital.

p "c) Policy as regards to activities of foreign investors: Virtually no restrictions.

p "d) Government guarantees regarding foreign-owned companies: Foreign Investment Law guarantees the same treatment as that accorded to nationals. .. ."

p The ad ends: "For additional information, please write to: Secretaria de Informacion y Prensa de la Presidencia de la Republica." No more, no less. Want to reap a handsome profit? Apply direct to Somoza. He'll guarantee you profits, and not forget himself in the process. Both sides will be happy.

p I trust that after these comments my reader will have a definite notion of why and for what purpose the International Monetary Fund decided in April 1979 to grant a $44 million loan. This regime ensuring the dominion of US investment stood in need of a financial shot in the arm. By staking a few dozen million dollars, hopes were still entertained of staying on and of getting the money back, if not a hundredfold, then at least with the old sizable interest.

p The world public disproved of this open US support for the Nicaraguan dictator. Even in the USA some congressmen 103 were shocked by the cynical action of financial tycoons. To varnish the IMF palpably unsavoury stance, several US newspapers featured comments "arguing" the legitimacy of intentions to grant Somoza a loan. Characteristic in this respect was the 14 May 1979 *Washington Post* editorial, "Destabilising Nicaragua", which said in part:

p “There is a fair consensus in Washington, or there used to be, that the United States acted reprehensibly when it used its influence in international financial institutions to ’destabilise’ the government in Chile in the early 1970s—by denying loans, credits, and the like. Now some of the people most exercised by that effort urge the United States to use its influence in the same institutions to destabilise the government in Nicaragua. This raises a question: if it is wrong to use an ostensibly apolitical institution like the World Bank or International Monetary Fund to squeeze a government of the right, as a group of legislators would like the IMF to do to Nicaragua. . .?”

p What casuistry! Its sole purpose is to hide behind a figleaf of decency and objectivity a die-hard policy supporting US stooges and decrying unsuitable governments. The US plot against the lawfully and popularly elected Allende Administration in Chile is termed “destabilisation”. Full US control of IMF is styled "influence in international financial institutions”. Meanwhile, the IMF itself, the instrument the USA employs to prosecute its policies, is described as "an ostensibly apolitical institution”. Not usually given to strong language, this time I simply cannot contain myself.

p “Last year,” the *Washington Post* editorial continues, "the United States tried for a time to negotiate President Somoza out of power, and, to put on heat, it engineered the collapse of a routine IMF loan to Nicaragua. This touch of politicisation did not remove the Somoza dynasty. . . . This time around, with no negotiations pending, a chastened Carter Administration intends to let the loans go through. That leaves Somoza in power. . ..”

No comment.

104

15 May

p The IMF decides to grant Somoza a $65.7 million loan, nearly half more than the intended $44 million loan. IMF says this has been done out of purely economic motives; as an institution devised to carry out international financial operations, it took no account of (political factors.

p By way of justification, the US Treasury claimed there were no economic motivations for IMF to deny the loan, and added that this North American move did not mean that the USA is not preoccupied with the situation in Nicaragua.

p Cast your mind back to the *Washington Post* editorial quoted earlier. The identity of formulas and arguments justifying the financial shot-in-the-arm for this insolvent regime at once strikes the eye. One even thinks that either the US Treasury borrowed from the editorial, or the editorial that the *Washington Post* published a day before the loan decision was endorsed, was written by Treasury officials to condition US public opinion to the move. At any rate, there is one more proof for you that both IMF and the *Washington Post* are at the full disposal of US circles who say what foreign policy should

be followed, and for whom the profits accruing from support for a dictatorship come before national prestige, morality, and world public opinion.

p In a recent issue, *Derechos Humanos en Centroamerica* reveals the machinery of US support for the Nicaraguan regime. "The State Department, paying but lip service to disassociation from the corrupt, repressive Somoza regime," it says, "is actually providing it with economic and military assistance via other countries to preserve that regime." Further, it says, "Israel, the USA's staunch political and military ally, has shipped vast arms consignments to Somoza. Argentina as well as neighbouring Central American states are doing the same.

p "On a recent US trip, a Central American Human Rights Commission member gained information from reliable sources of US support for the Nicaraguan dictator, as the USA still regards Somoza as an ally "helping the USA to 105 preserve and uphold political and military control in this region".

The question begs: for what purpose this $66-million loan, if the arms the USA has supplied Somoza with over recent years are more than enough to equip an army much larger than the National Guard? An analysis of reports in North American and Latin American information media leads to the conclusion that Sandinista guerillas arm themselves for the most part by capturing National Guard arsenals. However, should Somoza use the IMF loan to acquire more large Israeli arms consignments he, by employing more sophisticated hardware of Israeli make, will hope to rule out the possibility of Sandinistas augmenting their stores of ammunition by seizing such ammunition from the National Guard, as the more sophisticated kind will not fit the US- or Belgian-made submachine guns with which the Sandinistas are armed.

21 May

Mexican President Jose Lopez Portillo meets Costa Rican President Rodrigo Carazo, who is in Mexico for a brief visit. In Cancun, in Quintana Roo State, the two leaders discuss a range of bilateral and international issues. Speaking at a banquet in honour of the Costa Rican dignitary, the Mexican President concentrates on the Nicaraguan situation, noting that Somoza repression is plain genocide. He says he has instructed his Foreign Minister to break off diplomatic relations with Nicaragua, and urges other Latin American countries to follow suit.

22 May

p The *International Herald Tribune* reports: "Managua, May 21 (UPI) National Guardsmen shot and killed a Red Cross director yesterday as he evacuated children from a hospital in the town of Jinotega, where government troops were battling Sandinista guerillas. . . The Red Cross radio, monitored in Managua, said that Red Cross Director Enrique Pereira Meneses was shot by Guardsmen at the city's 106 hospital after they became angered at the way he answered their questions. The radio said that Mr. Pereira

was evacuating children at the time. It also said that the Red Cross had to move 700 persons, many of them children, who had taken refuge from gunfire in a warehouse."

p Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, in a futile attempt to suppress the popular uprising, the National Guard increasingly attacks the civilian population, plundering, destroying, and indiscriminately killing. In an open letter to Somoza, Leon's Bishop Manuel Salazar Espinoza, President of the Conference of Nicaraguan Bishops, exclaims, "It is impossible to tolerate the sowing of death and to watch jungle law take over. The day has come when it is each man for himself. Leon is going through the worst time in its history. It is an occupied ghost city, with troops coming and going, sowing terror and murder. I plead with you for the sake of God to stop this immense tide of crime and dolorous grief. The road we are following will lead to a reign of death. I implore you to stop this endless murder by an army which does not even spare children."

p Naturally, this appeal to a butcher to show mercy could have no effect. I have quoted from this letter of a respected Nicaraguan ecclesiastic, Bishop Manuel Salazar Espinoza, to show the attitude of Catholic hierarchs to the Somoza dictatorship, as the Leon Bishop was expressing the view of the *majority* of the country's priests.

p Indeed, only hours after the Bishop had published the appeal, a National Guard patrol in Leon was ordered by General Gonzales Evertz to execute 4 youngsters at the San Felipe Cemetery. Three were identified as Gerencio Quintanilla, Luis Rocha, and Ramiro Rocha. The firing squad was commanded by General Evertz himself, the soldiers in the firing squad were mostly drunk or high on drugs.

p When Somoza finally deigned to invite priests to his bunker for a "private conversation", the latter categorically declined. The Conference of Nicaraguan Bishops unanimously endorsed a statement declaring: "There is nothing at all human in what the authorities have just done, and therefore we consider it ill-advised to talk with the President."

p Mexico's dccibion to break off diplomatic relations with Nicaragua aroused favourable response in most Latin American countries and in Nicaragua itself. "This is a slap in the face for Somoza," declared Carlos Tunnerman, a prominent member of the Group of 12. Rafael Cordoba Rivas, a FAO leader, expressed the conviction that the severance of diplomatic relations would place the Somoza regime in still greater international isolation, and predicted that other Latin American states would shortly follow Mexico's example.

Indeed, a few days after the Costa Rican-Mexican summit, the Presidents of the five Andes Pact countries of Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia met in Cartagena, Colombia, and issued a statement declaring that their countries would respect the decision of states to break off diplomatic relations with Nicaragua. The Andes Pact countries, the document said, were proceeding with consultations to promote the

Nicaraguan solidarity campaign and press for collective action within the context of interstate relations, to terminate the bloodshed and guarantee human rights in this Central American country. The document was signed by Julio Cesar Turbay Ayala for Colombia, Luis Herrera Campins for Venezuela, General Francisco Morales Bermudez for Peru, General David Padilla for Bolivia, and Admiral Alfredo Poveda for Ecuador.

CHAPTER TEN
THE SECOND UPRISING

(A Chronicle)

31 May

The United FSLN National Directorate and General Staffs of the different fronts, brigades, columns, and regions appeal for a nationwide strike and announce the beginning of a general uprising to topple the Somoza dictatorship. The appeal declares that the hour for the overthrow of the much-hated dictatorship has arrived, and that the FSLN has launched its decisive offensive to destroy the despot's band of murderers and rapists. "A general strike by our heroic people will join up with the decisive armed offensive of the Sandinistas, and culminate in the rout of the criminal, venal Somoza dictatorship," the appeal says. The FSLN "exhorts all honest citizens to join the general strike to have the Somoza dictatorship abolished by the efforts of the entire nation. As of 4 June all shops and factories must close and all economic and social activities be suspended. The hour for the overthrow of the tyrant is here. The time has come for a free country to be born. To arms, all honest Nicaraguans! Hail the general uprising of the people of Nicaragua! The FSLN calls for a general strike!". The appeal was signed by all members of the United National Directorate including Daniel Ortega Saavedra, Humberto Ortega Saavedra, Yirtoi Manuel Tiiado Lope?, Tonras Boige, Bayarclo Arce Castano, Jaime Wheelock. Luis Carrion, Carlos Nunez, and Henry Ruiz, and also by representatives of the General Staffs of fionts, biigades, columns, and regions.

3 June

p Tomorrow a nationwide strike begins. Leaders of FAO and the Nicaraguan Democratic Movement together with the NPF and industrialists support the FSLN United National Directorate appeal to join the general strike.

p At a news contercnce in Managua, Sorno/a says he will ask the OAS for help in view of what he calls Costa Rrcan and Panamanian aggression against Nicaragua.

p Venezuelan President Luis Herrera Campins reaffirms his country's decision to help Costa Rica, should Nicaragua attack. He issues this statement to the press, when commenting on developments in Nicaragua. Thus far, Costa Rica has not asked for help, he says.

National Guard Lieutenant Julio Burtrago, El Naranjo garrison commander, is taken prisoner by Sandinistas and calls on Nicaraguan servicemen not to fire upon their people.

4 June

A FSLN communique claims that a military force of CONDECA members Honduras and El Salvador are operating in Northern Nicaragua. It also reports that US air-force transports are bringing equipment from Panama Canal Zone bases to the National Guard. Thus, on the night of 31 May, a North American S-47 carrying the number 6210 landed near Bluefields in Nicaragua.

Situation at Fighting Fronts

p *Rivas riverside*: National Guard attack on Sandinista Miraflores column is repulsed. Patriotic forces hold all riverside positions and logistically consolidated in liberated areas.

p *Leon*: Sandinistas launch a widescale dawn offensive. Hundreds of Sandinistas are fighting in the Saragoza, Subtiava, and other city neighbourhoods.

p *Chinandega*: Sandinistas occupy the San Antonio Sugar Refinery and attack Chinandega and El Viejo garrisons. Fighting continues near Chinandega.

p *Managua*: Barricades are thrown up at night in working class neighbourhoods in the Western section and 110 National Guard patrols are attacked. Many houses hang out the red-and-hlark FSLN flag. With the nationwide general strike, the city seems dead. Nothing is running and all factories and shops are shut.

p According to agency dispatches published in the *International Herald Tribune* on 5 June, "A US Embassy source said that the State Department has issued no new advisories, but a warning against traveling to Nicaragua for other than essential business. . . . Most residents stayed indoors as the guerillas, many wearing red-and-black bandanas, roamed the streets." This is featured under the heading, "Strike to Oust Somoza Shuts Managua".

According to UN sources, a letter addressed to the USA's UN Ambassador Andrew Young and also to US Senators Edward Kennedy and Thomas Harkins and signed by Sergio Ramirez and Miguel D'Escotto, both of the Group of 12, has been received revealing that Hercules aircraft from the USA's Howard military base in Panama are bringing supplies of weapons and ammunition to the National Guard. "We Nicaraguans," the letter says, "are fed up with the North American Administration's rhetoric about democracy, human rights, and national self-determination. While not asking the North American Administration to sympathise with the patriotic goals for which we are fighting, we demand that it discontinue all assistance to the murderers of the Nicaraguan people. We resolutely condemn this criminal interference as a grave violation of the right of our people to self-determination, of the right to rise up against tyranny, of the right to create a free and democratic nation."

5 June

p UPI reports, "Sandinista guerillas controlled the city of Leon today and Managua was a virtual ghost town paralysed by a general strike." In Leon Sandinistas capture

Guatemalan Army Colonel Oscar Ruben Castaneda, the Guatemalan Military Attache to Nicaragua, in the city to coordinate operation by CONDECA forces.

p In an extensive account, the Mexican newspaper *El Dia* 111 describes the last ten years of US military aid to Somoza. Details were provided by North American investigators Cynthia Arnson, Max Holland, and Michael Klare. According to them, the USA supplied Nicaragua with eight large HN-34 transport helicopters, Sherman tanks, 105-mm howitzers, more than 1,000 missiles and large-calibre shells.

p With ex-CIA agent Samuel Cummings as go-between, Somoza got military aircraft, Blie and Sikorsky helicopters, armoured vehicles, and M-16 automatic rifles. Through Cummings' Interarms Corporation, the former ARMCO, Somoza acquired in 1978 Danish Madsen and Israeli UZI submachine guns and Galil rifles. Also in 1978, Somoza acquired through the Engesa firm of Brazil vehicles and armoured carriers, and through the Engesa daughter firm of Embraer, military aircraft. Given training at various military schools were 5,670 Nicaraguan officers and men.

In the evening, Somoza proclaims martial law thus giving the National Guard a completely free hand to summarily arrest anyone "on legal grounds" and also completely depriving the civilian population of the right to free movement throughout the country.

6 June

p The general strike is in its third day. In Managua National Guard patrols occupy banks and other financial institutions. Serviceable petrol pumps are manned by soldiers who fill only army vehicles.

The Peru's Committee of Solidarity with the People of Nicaragua issues a call for a mass drive to collect medicines, food, and arms for the embattled people of Nicaragua, and also for a campaign against imperialist manoeuvres in that country and in OAS to keep Somozaism with or without Somoza.

7 June

p Adolfo Ahumada, the Panama's Minister of the Interior and Justice, says that the campaign mounted in the USA against ratification of the Panama Canal Agreement is led by people connected with the Somoza regime, more 112 specifically US Congressman John Murphy, architect of one of the projects seeking to emasculate the coordinated agreement. He also says that Murphy had invited Luis Pallais Debayle, Deputy Speaker of the Nicaraguan Legislative Assembly, to make an anti-Panamanian address in the US House of Representatives.

p The Panamanian Minister says that through fiiends in the North American Congress Somoza had tried to block ratification of the new Canal agreement to thus have the opportunity of blackmailing the Panamanian government into suspending its support of the Sandinistas in exchange for Nicaraguan support for ratification. Adolfo Ahumada

says his government would never support the dictator, and gave the assurance that solidarity with the people of Nicaragua "will be effective and concrete" until Somoza falls. Karen De Young writes in the *Washington Post*: " Sandinista guerillas began closing a wide circle around the capital. . . . Managua remained relatively calm ... but there was a feeling here that a noose was tightening around the city and that a major attack on the capital is only a question of days. . . . The guerillas also appear to have the strong backing of much of the population in the occupied cities. The fact that they have for the first time begun to give the impression they are capable of victory has been a large moral factor among their civilian supporters. In Managua, many opposition leaders and prominent government supporters and officials have moved out of their homes in fear of an attack."

p In Madrid, in an *El Pais* interview, Managua Archbishop Miguel Obando Bravo, the Catholic Primate of Nicaragua, declares that Somoza could be ousted only by force of arms. He says the war the Nicaraguans are fighting against Somoza is a just war. "Most of us never imagined," he says, "how great the propensity this man and his National Guard has for destruction", and adds that he never thought Somoza would be able, as he has done now, to wipe whole cities and towns off the face of the earth.

p In the *International Herald Tribune* on 4 June, under the heading "Final Offensive Launched by Guerillas in 113 Nicaragua", Alan Riding, attempting to analyse developments there, says in part:

p "In preparation for the offensive, the Sandinistas have carried out months of harassment of the National Guard, including several ambushes of military convoys.. . .

p "The National Guard has killed several Sandinista commanders and an estimated 3,000 civilians this year. There are no reliable figures on casualties in combat.

p "In contrast to last September, the three factions of the Sandinista Front known as the Insurrectionists, the Prolonged Popular War, and the Proletarian Tendency, have formed a joint leadership and are coordinating their military and political activities. . . .

p "The political position of the Sandinistas has also been strengthened by the failure of a US-led mediation team to resolve the crisis between Gen. Somoza and the right–ofcentre coalition known as the Broad Opposition Front. After Gen. Somoza refused in Jarruary to consent to an internationally supervised plebiscite on his rule, the mediation effort collapsed and the Broad Opposition Front lost credibility for many Nicaraguans.

p "Since then, a coalition of 18 pro-Sandinista groups, the National Patriotic Front, has gained strength and popularity and has begun to operate as the political arm of the rebel army."

On the whole, one can agree with this assessment. On the central point, the analyst is right when he says that the NPF speaks for the overwhelming majority in Nicaragua and reflects popular interests.

From a Radio Sandino Broadcast on 7 June

“Jack Martin, Political Attache at the US Embassy in Managua, has been having confidential meetings at his home with Julio Cesar Quintana, Nicaragua’s Foreign Minister, Col. Aurelio Somarriva of the General Staff, and Col. Valle Salinas, Managua Police Chief. Somoza knew nothing of these secret meetings, the first of which, that is to become known, was held at 6:30 p.m. on 1 June, and the second of which took place at noon on Sunday, 3 June. According to 114 what Somoza’s Foreign Minister (Quintana) told a friend who left later for abroad, they discussed Somoza’s immediate resignation, which the Americans want, so that afterwards, through constitutional reform, his place could be taken by Quintana, who despite his advanced age has not lost hopes of becoming President. Evidently Col. Somarriva and Col. Valle Salinas promised Quintana their support. Radio Sandino obtained this information from FSLN Military Intelligence".

10 June

p Somoza aircraft cruelly pound Sandinista-held residential areas. William Chislett of the *Observer* says that "... the superior strength of Somoza’s forces, particularly in the air, which is being deployed with increasing ferocity, means that a prolonged bloodbath is in the offing. I saw the damage caused in Masaya by rockets and bombs fired from Cessna planes converted for strafing. A shopkeeper showed me his downstairs bedroom which had been devastated by a bomb. The street corner was splattered with blood".

What strikes the eye in the latest West European press reports is the conjuncture by many newspapers and wire services that CONDECA regulars may intervene in Nicaragua.

12 June

p According to FSNL, last Sunday four Guatemalan airmen sent by CONDECA took part in bombing Managua.

p At a news conference in Panama former National Guard officers, Prensa Latina reports, appealed to National Guardsmen to surrender to patriots or turn arms against all seeking to salvage the dictatorship. Speaking for the group was Lt.–Col. Bernardino Larios, leader of the Free Officers Movement. Also in attendance were Major Adolfo Rubi, Captain Jose Valladares, and Lieutenant Rigoberto Buitrago. Major Rubi said very many officers sought to disassociate themselves from Somoza but were afraid to come out against him, fearing that they would be killed by security commandos. He said the unit under Somoza’s son Anastasio Somoza Portocarrero was the dictator’s main prop.

115

Brandon Grove, US Under-Secretary of State for Latin America, is to head a team to draft recommendations on Nicaragua for the US Administration. This is announced in Washington by State Department spokesman Hodding Carter, who also says that Managua’s first 60 US evacuees have arrived at Howard Base in the Panama Canal Zone.

13 June

p “In Washington,” Reuter reports, "US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance suggested a meeting of the Organisation of American States to arrange a ceasefire in Nicaragua, halt the flow of arms to the warring sides, and try to resolve the crisis. He told a press conference the United States had told President Somoza a political solution was necessary to solve the problem.”

How did the USA seek to reach a "political solution to solve the problem"? Right after the Vance statement, writers on world affairs conjectured that the USA is again planning to use the "big stick" and send punitive forces under the odious OAS flag to crush the patriotic movement in Nicaragua.

16 June

It seems as if the most pessimistic conjectures are right. Somoza has received with uncontrolled glee plans to send a "inter-American force" to Nicaragua. Thus, France Presse reports from Managua: "Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza’s embattled government opened the door to a negotiated settlement with the Sandinista guerilla movement which is trying to overthrow it. . . .” What an heartening beginning, a dictator forced to seek contacts with his opponents and most likely having the only option to surrender, as the Sandinistas will not consent to any more Somoza or Somozaism. However, on to the second portion of the message: "...When it announced it was ready to accept an inter-American peace-keeping force to restore peace in the country (save the mark!).” If that doesn’t take the cake! Somoza wants an international punitive squad sent in, but the France Presse correspondent reports this as his having 116 “opened the door to a negotiated settlement"! Nothing but yellow journalism, undertaken to pull the wool down over the eyes of the world public.

17 June

p In a joint statement, the five Andes Pact countries recognise that a just war is being fought against a tyranny in Nicaragua. Bolivia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru demonstrate solidarity with the patriots of Nicaragua. As is pointed out in this joint statement of the Andes Pact Foreign Ministers, published in Caracas and the other four capitals, the patriotic forces waging a just struggle in Nicaragua against the Somoza dictatorship are recognised as a belligerent, as the true representative of that Central American republic, and as entitled to international support. Publication of this statement implies juridical recognition of the Nicaraguan patriots as a belligerent.

In San Jose Tomas Borge of the FSLN United National Directorate announces a Provisional Democratic Government of National Reconstruction, including Sergio Ramirez, of the Group of 12, Moises Hassan of the Movimiento del Pueblo Unido, Alfonso Radello of the Broad Opposition Front, Daniel Ortega Saavedra of the FSLN leadership, and Violeta Barrios, widow of murdered journalist Pedro Joaquin Chamorro.

The Provisional Government will reportedly take up residence for the time being in Rivas as soon as it is freed from Somoza forces.

18 June

p The Sandinistas continue successful military action against Somoza's National Guard. Reuter reports from Managua, "President Anastasio Somoza has apparently suffered a severe setback with the reported loss of two major cities in the North to leftist Sandinista guerillas.... An official communique says the National Guard has pulled out of its command post in the second city of Leon .. . this now left the city in the Sandinistas' hands. The National Guardsmen have been under siege by encircling rebels for several days. The sources said the Sandinistas had also taken the city of 117 Matagalpa, about 124 miles . .. north of the capital of Managua.... In both cases the sources said the withdrawal of troops from the cities was a strategic move aimed at getting the Sandinistas surrounded in each case."

p What does this really mean? Has "Somoza suffered a severe setback"? Or is "the withdrawal of troops ... a strategic move aimed at getting the Sandinistas surrounded"? The same Reuter report briefly notes that "Ecuador became the third country to withdraw diplomatic recognition of Nicaragua. Mexico and Costa Rica have already done so". Note, not of Somoza, not of his regime, but "of Nicaragua"!

p Somoza is in increasing isolation, a fact which cannot be ignored by the Carter Administration, which still hopes to get the OAS to accept at a future meeting its proposal to intervene in Nicaragua by sending an OAS "inter–American force" there. After reporting a growing campaign in the Latin American countries to recruit volunteers to fight alongside the patriots, France Presse cabled from Managua that "... the only expression of support to President Somoza came from 130 US Congressmen, Democrats and Republicans, who asked President Jimmy Carter to resume immediate US military aid to the Managua government. The 125 House Representatives and 5 Senators also criticised what they describe as President Carter's 'inaction' over the Nicaraguan situation".

The Provisional Nicaraguan Government announces its future programme of action, crystalling the programmes of all organisations represented. All Somoza dynasty loot will be expropriated. Foreign policy will be one of non–alignment, at home the government will rescind the Somoza "constitution", and revise all agreements with transnational cartels. A new sovereign democratic army will be established to incorporate Sandinistas and all National Guardsmen who break with Somozd and help to expose his crimes.

22 June

p There is much comment before OAS meets as to what kind of resolution will go through, and which countries will 118 vote with the USA to send a punitive force into Nicaragua to salvage the Somoza regime. France Presse reports from Washington: "The United States and the Andes Pact countries would probably favour an OAS intervention,

which could involve sending a pan-American peace-keeping force into Nicaragua." However, Mexico is leading eight states in an all-out defence of the OAS Charter-enshrined principle of non-intervention. To contend at this juncture that the Andes Pact countries "would favour an OAS intervention which could involve sending a pan-American force" is either to betray wishful thinking, or absolutely fail to understand the situation. It is the Andes Pact countries that consistently champion non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states.

A more reliable report received from Managua says that "a US White House spokesman said yesterday that the US would send troops to Managua if the situation demanded this, although the Administration would be guided by the OAS meeting" (France Presse, 23 June).

24 June

p The USA sustains its greatest setback in all of OAS history. Realising after probes that its resolution sanctioning US armed intervention in Nicaragua would fail, the USA did not even put up its seven-proviso draft, the third saying that OAS would advise members on an OAS peace-keeping presence in Nicaragua, to contribute to preservation of public law and order, and the seventh advising OAS states to assign equipment and personnel to carry out the aims set in the resolution.

p After reading the US draft, Dominican Foreign Minister Ramon Emilio Jimenez declares, "We lived through intervention in 1965, and would not wish that upon any American nation."

p On Saturday night the USA tried to push through a second resolution, advising calling on the warring sides in Nicaragua to cease fire and sending into the country a " civilian" delegation to negotiate. When this project failed, the USA could only vote for the resolution put forward by most 119 Latin American states, which represents a signal victory for the people of Nicaragua, for the patriots fighting for freedom, for all progressives in Latin America.

p For curiosity's sake, allow me to quote from the Reuter report, which interpreted the US fiasco in OAS thus: "The Organisation of American States (OAS), *responding to an urgent United States appeal*, (my emphasis—*Auth.*) has called for the immediate replacement of Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza who is fighting an attempt by Sandinista guerillas to overthrow him." This is followed by the remark: "But it (the OAS) dropped the United States proposal, made by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, to send an inter-American peace-keeping force to the beleaguered country." It appears the USA called for the immediate replacement of Somoza, although the whole world had thought it was bending over backwards to salvage its pocket dictator. One more instance of misleading yellow journalism.

p The OAS resolution, which was adopted by 17 votes, declares, "The solution of this grave problem is exclusively the concern of the Nicaraguan people.

p “In the view of the 17th Consultative Meeting of Foreign Ministers, this solution should proceed from the following basis:

p “1. The immediate, definitive replacement of the Somoza regime.

p “2. The installation in the territory of Nicaragua of a democratic government whose composition would include the principal groups in opposition to the Somoza regime, and which would reflect the freely expressed will of the people of Nicaragua.

p “3. Guaranteed respect for human rights for all Nicaraguans without exception.

p “4. The holding of free elections as early as possible, which would lead to the establishment of a genuinely democratic government and that would guarantee peace, liberty, and justice.”

Such was the finishing touch of an OAS Foreign Ministers’ meeting which will go down in the annals of Latin American history.

120

5 July

p FSLN troops completely encircle the Nicaraguan capital of Managua.

It is clear that the dictator’s days are numbered.

16 July

Somoza flees from Managua to the USA, transferring Presidential powers to Francisco Urcuyo, his brother-in-law, who at once announces that he will on no account defer to the Provisional Democratic Government of National Reconstruction of Nicaragua, and will stay on till 1981.

17 July

p FSLN forces attack on every front. All are certain that the new stooge in the Somoza-vacated bunker will hold on for but a few days, no more.

Some one hundred newsmen from the biggest wire services, periodicals, and radio and television stations have gathered in neighbouring Costa Rica. The five Soviet newsmen include, Lev Novikov of USSR Radio and Television, Vladimir Silantyev of *Izvestia*, Vladimir Shekhovtsov of TASS, and Lev Kostanyan and myself from *Pravda*. We unanimously ask Enrique Mora Valverde, the TASS correspondent in Costa Rica, who is held in high regard there and by FSLN leaders, to head our group. The main thing is not to jump the gun, and yet get to Managua first. We hear there is a possibility of chartering

a private plane and of getting to Managua as soon as National Guardsmen are driven out. Not much of an option, but we must not miss it

18 July

p A day that will go down in Nicaraguan annals as the last day of the dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty, installed by North American imperialism nearly fifty years ago. In collaboration with TASS correspondent Vladimir Shekhovtsov, I transmit to Moscow the following record of the day's events.

p *0:30*. The Provisional Government prepare to emplane

p from Costa Rica to Leon, which it will make its headquarters before moving to Managua.

p *4:00*. The FSLN takes Grenada in a lightning assault. Some 400 National Guardsmen surrender.

p *4:40*. National Guard garrisons in Ocotal, Nueva Segovia Province, and Somoto, Madriz Province, recognise the new government.

p *8:00* So-called pro tern President Francisco Urcuyo again declares he will stay on till 1981.

p *10:30*. Radio Sandino communiques report successful operations near Managua and elsewhere.

p *11:00*. Sandinistas capture the National Guard telecommunication centre, thus cutting off the line to Miami from which Somoza is still trying to direct the few remaining loyal punitive units The centre's personnel defect to the Sandinistas.

p *11 to 12 a.m*. Urcuyo intensively confers with US Embassy staff, more specifically the US Counsellor, to find a way out of a hopeless quandary.

p *12:20*. National Guard Chief of Staff says "Surrender".

p *13:20*. Pilots of fourteen Somoza aircraft land with their families in Honduras.

p *14:50*. Several high-ranking National Guard officers seize two Red Gross planes in Managua and fly out with their families.

p *15:00*. In Hotel Balmoral in the Costa Rican capital, representatives of Nicaragua's Provisional Democratic Government of National Reconstruction give a press conference for local and foreign newsmen. Manuel Espinosa, the official spokesman, announces the

composition of a 33-man State Council that with the Provisional Government will exercise legislative authority in Nicaragua.

p Also read out is the Provisional Government's first decree, which begins, "The 45-year-old Somoza dictatorship has fallen^^1^^" Also lead out is the Piovisional Government's appeal to world governments to recognise the new democratic authority in Nicaragua.

p *16:00*. The five Andes Pact countries and the Dominican Republic, Panama, Costa Rica, and Mexico end a 122 conference in San Jose and agree not to recognise the newfangled Urcuyo regime.

p 78:05. Urcuyo quits bunker and, accompanied by US Ambassador Lourenso Pizzola enplanes for Guatemala.

18:30. It is learned that tomorrow the Provisional Government will move from Leon to Managua.

19 July

p The Provisional Democratic Government of National Reconstruction arrives in Managua this night. A few hours earlier, we, the first group of foreign newsmen, land at Managua airport in our chartered plane. We are now in the newly liberated city. Two flags, the red-and-black banner of the FSLN and the state flag of the Republic of Nicaragua, fly over Tiscapa Hill, where the dictator had his bunker.

p A new day begins, the first day of free land. *Managua—Moscow*,

July 1979

Sandinista Camp Glimpses

“THEY’RE KILLING PEOPLE THERE”

p **Genrikh BOROVIK**

124 125

p An ordinary refugee camp. In the midst of a warm, sunny November day, when everything around is green, human misery and grief seem particularly unbearable, of an ashen-grey—like the blanket on the tent floor. While the tents—of khaki and plain green in the smiling sun—are like oxygen bottles suddenly introduced at a gala; unexpected, nightmarish, wanted when others bask in the warm sunshine.

p An ordinary camp, with misery written on every face, with sick children, with quarantine, with the ever imminent threat of an epidemic, with incessant laundering, with a feeling of dispossessed insecurity and anxiety and a longing for the future, and everyone and everything still there in Nicaragua, in Nica, as they say here.

p Anxiety clamours from morning till night; people eagerly grab newspapers and burst out of tents whenever news from Nica is broadcast.

p The eyes of the children reflect an ageless sadness.

p “How old are you?”

p “Eight.”

p “Here long?”

p “Very long!" (Three weeks, the camp schoolteacher explains.)

p “Why did you leave Nicaragua?”

p “They’re killing people there.”

p The little girl says this simply, matter-of-factly, to burst into sobs only when she recollects that her mother and father are still there, that she is here with her grandmother.

126

p The teacher (here tent serves as school) tells me later that nothing is known of the whereabouts of the little girl’s parents. Attempts have been made to trace them, but to no avail. Quite likely they are no longer alive.

p There are 33,000 Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica alone, even then only foi October and November 1978. 'I he camp wheie I am is one of the many the Red Gross has set up conjointly with the Costa Rican Government.

p Every tent is a token of grief, every person, a token of grief.

p The worst news is not from newspapers nor from broadcasts; it comes itself, conveyed from mouth to mouth. The teacher I chatted with at the camp school has learned but today that his brother has been killed by Somoza's men in Nica. News comes quickly. The Nicaraguan border is only several kilometres away, the border across which is fascism.

p Only a few kilometres part democracy from fascism. For the refugee it does not divide, it unites, linking the two sides of one tragedy.

p None wants to talk to a journalist here. Nobody wants to show grief or imperil a relative still there, on the other side of the border that runs through jungle.

p Maria de Leon, 45, tells her story with difficulty. Not only because it is hard to tell. It is hard for her to speak. She lies on a felt blanket carpeting the tent's plastic floor, her head swathed in a towel, her legs still bleeding, and barely able to move her right arm. Her story is shockingly simple.

p She was a shopkeeper. A small-time shopkeeper who sold sundry notions in her small stall. Never had anything to do with politics. Had her hands full without that. Aren't eight children enough? She was arrested at six o'clock in the morning, while cooking breakfast. Five National Guardsmen burst in, trussed her up, gagged her, drew a sack over her head, carried her out like a parcel and thrust her into an army truck. (She, of course, had heard of the countrywide arrests. But it was one thing to hear about somebody else, another thing when you yourself were being arrested.)

p She was questioned in haste. What she said was barely 127 heeded Room had to be made for the next. All that she was asked was how many times she had concealed weapons for the Sandinistas. She had never done that. She doesn't even have much of a notion of who the Sandinistas are, although she has heard the name. All she ever did was to sell sundry items in her little stall and take care of her children. Quite enough to forego politics.

p She was suspended from a hook by hei bound hands and beaten up. She was kicked, struck at with rifle butts, and clubbed. In command was a Somoza captain. Seated beside him was an American explaining something to the officer as he munched on a sandwich. She is sure it was an American—the accent, the appearance, the rest.

p She cried out that she didn't know anything. That she had never seen a Sandinista. That her neighbours could bear her out.

p “You wouldn’t wear a red kerchief if you’d never seen a Sandinista,” the captain tiredly objected. The American finished his sandwich and said, "Go on. She probably knows something.”

p The words about the red kerchief, the kerchief she had bought not so long ago and had worn several times, unaware that she had bought herself misery, were the last to reach her. She was taken into the mountains and while still unconscious, tossed over the edge. (The sack had previously been removed, needed for the next victim.) She was picked up by local peasants. Her house was razed and the ashes packed down by a tank.

p Feeling faint, she interrupts her story time and again. One of her boys brings her a drink of water. The youngest sits by her side, listening as he plays with a scarlet plastic toy truck.

p Nowadays it is hard to astonish the world with stories of cruelty, with stories of grief, repression, and betrayal. But when you touch grief, when-it cries out, the skin crawls.

p Imprinted forever on the eyes of everyone here from Nica are pictures time will hardly ever erase.

p Here, now, are some of these stories which I took down in the camp, as related to me by refugees.

p “... On the way from Masaya to Managua I saw a man helping along a wounded woman. She was weeping and crying that National Guardsmen had killed her two children and that she had nothing to live for. A National Guard patrol drove up, the officer calmly pulled out his pistol, and fired it at her. Without anger, he simply said, "Well, if you don’t want to live, don’t.” She shuddered and her eyes opened. He fired his pistol once again, straight into her face. Then he holstered his gun and the patrol moved on. The man stood there, his face buried in his hands. He thought he would be killed too, but he wasn’t. I ran towards a truck parked by the roadside to hide behind it. Inside was a man. I touched him. He was dead... .”

p ”. . . In Esteli, it was, they led a group of teenagers out into the street, eight or nine of them, none of them older than fourteen. They ranked them up and the sergeant said he was going to teach them how to march in formation. All of a sudden they were fired at. By three soldiers with submachine guns. The children dropped. Surprise was written on their faces. I hid in the doorway of a gutted house. Then the soldiers took out two jerry cans and poured petrol over the bodies. Some of the boys were still alive, and stretched out a hand. But the soldiers didn’t bother even to kill them. They dragged them together and set fire to them. I stood in the doorway till nightfall, afraid to step out.”

p Nowadays it is hard to astonish the world with cruelty.

p But Somoza seemed to have set himself that aim.

p It is hard to astonish the world with hypocrisy. But the US Administration, that staunch and consistent ally of dictator Somoza, seems to be doing that.

p After Somoza drowned the popular October 1977 uprising in blood, after he killed opposition leader and journalist Pedro Chamorra in January 1978, President Carter officially congratulated President Somoza on his “achievement” in improving the human rights situation.

p After Somoza had massacred thousands of compatriots for hating his fascist dictatorship, the White House finally announced after long silence, that it condemns violations of human rights in Nicaragua.

p In the refugee camp on the border with Nica, these words, “condemnation” and “violation”, are seen not as hypocrisy, but as mockery. As a mockery of the grief felt by the little girl who fled from Nica because they are killing people there, of the grief felt by Maria de Leon, of the grief felt by the mothers whose children were gunned down and burned in the streets of Esteli, of the grief felt by the teacher whose brother was slain in Nica the other day.

p The US Administration says it is discontinuing all aid to Somoza. In the refugee camp on the border with Nicaragua they know the true price of these words, which they see as an outright lie. They know just as President Carter knows that American advisers still advise the National Guard and that American mercenaries still pilot Nicaraguan aircraft.

p The US Administration has announced that it has stopped selling arms to Somoza.

p But in the refugee camp on the border with Nicaragua, they know that in Managua four days ago there landed with the US government’s connivance four Israeli air transports bringing in weapons for Somoza’s National Guard. They even know the make of the submachine guns delivered to the butchers, that they are Galil submachine guns. The US Administration tells the world that it wants to help settle peacefully the conflict in Nicaragua, but in the refugee camp they know that the US State Department men mediating between Somoza and the Broad Opposition Front did all they could to keep Somoza in power.

p I am writing this at a time when the deadline which the Sandinistas have put before the fascist dictator Somoza, for him to abdicate and leave the country by 21 November 1978, is running out.

p But today Somoza encouraged by American backing and having built one more ferro-concrete wall around his bunker in Managua has declared that he is "proud of his Presidency”, and hopes to be governing after the next “elections”, in 1981.

p Today, only three hours ago, the overweening Somoza, encouraged by US backing, ordered his cut-throats to intrude 130 into Costa Rica at a point but several kilometres away from the refugee camp.

p National Guardsmen have again crossed into Costa Rica, causing casualties.

p Only this moment Costa Rica's President has announced the rupture of diplomatic relations with Nicaragua.

p In the refugee camp no one sleeps.

They anxiously wonder what will happen next.

A SMALL LAND'S GREAT DREAMS

p "Can you walk along without making any noise?" Jose asks.

p "Of course." (What else can I say?)

p Jose gives a satisfied nod. The Toyota bumps for the last time over the last hole in the road, and stops. Silence drops down at once. So does darkness. Jose switches off the shaded headlights, and the dashboard. Bright fireflies dart about the clearing, each shedding a 40-watt glow. When a firefly makes a beeline it seems to be a man coming along, flashing a torchlight at chest level. Were I a sentinel, I would certainly shoot.

p A starling twitters softly right at hand. Jose responds. A greyish-white hardly discernible splotch emerges from the thick dark grass. As it draws nearer it assumes the shape of a grey head of a man in uniform holding a submachine gun.

p "It's you?" he asks.

p "It's me," Jose nods. Then with a wave at me, "The journalist I told you about." Placing an arm on the greyhead's shoulder, he adds, "Our priest. One of the several with us."

p The padre slings the submashine gun behind his back and we exchange a firm handclasp. They whisper, after which the padre enquires with a businesslike air, "Does he know how to walk?"

p "He says he does," Jose replies.

p Off we go. I glimpse a barely discernible trail in the grass, which disappears the moment we enter the jungle. Jose confidently plods on, now bending, now brushing a branch aside. I try to imitate him, to put down a foot not 132 on its heel but on its tip, and follow in his footprints. But the jungle grows thicker, and all that I see are Jose's lighttoned palms and face on those few tare occasions when he turns around to look at me. At tunes he disappears completely, and I feel the flesh crawl. We must have been going on for an hour and a half, when Jose suggests we take a breather. I at once plump down on a fallen tiee tiunk.

p "I must be making quite a noise," I say.

p "It's all right," he chuckles, swinging his submachine gun from shoulder to shoulder. "Two in the jungle is nothing. When you have two hundred, doing it at night, and with a full pack, that's something. But we're getting used to it," he assures me.

p "Show me how you do it," I ask.

p Jose smiles, raises, takes a few paces, and . . . vanishes. I cock an ear, but don't hear a thing. A couple of minutes pass and I feel a bit worried, when suddenly I hear a soft voice behind me say, "That's nothing. What's really hard is to come up close."

p Standing behind me at arm's length, Jose continues under his breath, as if nothing has happened: "We have three kinds of training camps, the first for the novice, the third for the experienced. In the first we teach the rudiments, which very often includes reading and writing. Back in Nica three-quarters of the population are illiterate, just as a hundred years ago. The second is an intermediate camp, while those who complete training at the third are ready to go into battle."

p "Where do you get people from?"

p "From all over. Mostly youngsters running away from Somoza. He's staging a real hunt for them. Jails them, and kills them. He knows the young are with us, and that's why he's wiping them out."

p Jose breaks off to cock an ear for a few instants, and then calmly continues, "In Esteli in September we attacked National Guard barracks, and would have captured them. But when they heard that our attack was coming, you know what they did? They herded into the barracks 14- and 15–year-olds and also smaller children, and poking machine 133 guns into their backs told them to stay where they were. Anyone who tried to run was mowed down. The moment we saw them in front of us, we stopped. We couldn't fire at kids, and so had to desist. But an hour later they shot all of them, down to the last kid, with machine guns! I must say the young are joining us not just because they are afraid of Somoza. They're doing it consciously, as things just have to change. It can't go on any longer like this." "How do they find you?"

p "We've got our own people all around the country. Anyone who wants to, can always find a way to contact us."

p We resume our trek. Three or four times somebody calls out in a whisper, and each time my companion says, " Gomandante Jose here." After exchanging a few indistinct words with the sentinel, we go on. From time to time he calls a halt, apparently believing I needed a rest. In these intermissions he always tells me something.

p "You're in luck," he says, "the rainy season's over. Three weeks earlier you'd be up to your ears in water and up to your knees in mud."

p Despite the manifest caution displayed, I have the feeling that the Sandinistas were in full control of a vast tract of jungle land. That may not be really so, but the entire warning network operates without a hitch, and everyone we see is in uniform and carries a submachine gun. It's more like the outposts of a regular army than of guerillas. When I mention that to Jose, he nods. "That's the whole thing," he says. "We've got to make an army out of the guerillas. That's vital to come to grips with Somoza."

p Suddenly we are in the middle of the camp. At any rate that is my impression. One more sentinel calls out and after about a hundred paces, Jose leads me into a wooden barn, rather, into a small partitioned-off side room in which a storm lantern swings from the ceiling, there are shelves of medicine in jars, tubes of ointment, ampules of penicillin, neat stacks of packages of aspirin, absorbent cotton, and bandages, while on the floor are boxes of cartridges, cartridge belts for machine guns, and in one corner a pile of 134 blue-striped grey army blankets. I glance at my wristwatch—it is two o'clock at night.

p "Feeling hungry?" Jose asks turning up the lamp. "We've got boiled rice with beans. Cold, true. Better hit the hay. Put a blanket on the floor and take another one to cover yourself with. Better fall in while no one's around. We're having a night-time jungle forced-march drill. Reveille is at a quarter to five. You're lucky, a wind's come up and there won't be any mosquitoes, they're a pretty hard lot to cope with," Jose chuckles and leaves, but not before turning the lamp down low.

p The wind blows harder, causing a loose sheet of corrugated iron to rattle on the roof. This affair, apparently a barn once upon a time, had been built a long time ago, and had fallen into disuse also a long time ago.

p ,1 go outside. The sky suddenly plunges down upon me with a low-hung array of bright, twinkling stars which here seem in utter confusion, as compared to the well-ordered arrangement over Moscow. It seems as if somebody has negligently cast over the entire camp one enormous camouflage net for some reason bespangled underneath with brightly fluorescing tinsel. . . .

p "Martinez, Jorge, Antonio,—to me!"

p I open my eyes. Right in front of my face I see the muzzle of a submachine gun, hanging from a nail on the wall. Another ten or so also hang on the wall. They are oddly assorted makes—Spanish Cessnas, Venezuelan Fals, American M-16s, and several old Garands, American semiautomatic rifles of World War II vintage.

p Stretch out on the floor by my side and fast asleep are the owners of these weapons, a dozen husky young lads. Bewhiskered, bearded, and clear-shaven, not older than 22–23, I'd say, some even less. One smiles in his dreams, another puckers his lips like a little baby, a third knits his brows, moving his lips meanwhile, a fourth shoots out a hand—perhaps to grasp his gun. It's half past four. Trying not to tread on an outflung arm or a leg, I step out of doors.

p Day is breaking. Martinez, Jorge, and Antonio stand in a huddle around their commander. He barks a brief order, and the four slip into the jungle.

p The barn stands at the very fringe of a large clearing in the jungle, sloping down at one end and up at the other. A field kitchen is to be seen beneath a spreading tree some

twenty paces away. A guerilla wearing khakhi breeches is chopping up a dried tree for firewood, using an axe on a very long handle, that must be some one and a half metres long.

p Other guerillas brew coffee, stir the rice, and boil water in a black cauldron. A tiny transistor radio, swinging from a branch emits a haunting tune. Hanging from the same branch are several Garands that belong to the cooks. The guerillas emerge from the jungle at a quarter to five. They came calling out to one another, slapping one another on the back, and rubbing eyes and faces to shake off the last vestiges of sleep. Nearly all are grinning. There's nothing to laugh at though, no wise-cracks, in fact, nothing even said as yet, except a few interjections, but they all grin. Why? No doubt because a new day had dawned.

p All the men coming up, those still half-awake and halfdressed carry machine guns. A girl trips out, holding a submachine gun in one hand, as with the other she takes hairpins out of her mouth and adroitly puts up her jet-black mass of hair. All the guerillas are bound by orders not to let their guns out of their hands, to keep their guns by their sides, day and night.

p A sprawling cloud drapes the mountain tops. Grey, amorphous and damp, like a huge jelly-fish smothering the crater of a volcano. As it rises out of the Atlantic from somewhere beyond the mountains, the sun tinges its upper edge with gold.

p "Fall in!" comes the command through the morning air. Setting-up exercises start exactly at six under the eyes of the youthful sturdy PT instructor. Everything is according to timetable, with the same smooth precision as in a regular army.

p Left turn! comes the order. A couple turned right. Right 136 turn, comes the order. Again, a couple turn left the wrong way. I can't help recollecting the Spanish Republican fighters seen in the sequences that Roman Carmen shot forty years ago.

p One reedy fellow can't seem to cope with his stalky arms. They dangle haphazardly as if buffeted by the wind, out of rhythm, arousing a mournful look in the eyes of the energetic PT instructor. On the other hand, Reedy is quite fluent in English. He is assigned to me interpret for the Sandinistas, who treat him with a fun-poking affection and call him not by his right name, Pedro, but by the nickname either of Senor Italiano (with reference to his mother's nationality), or Senor Spaghetti (with reference both to nationality and his reedy form). He responds to both with a huge grin and a ravenous willingness to run any errand and volunteer any help. Not to waste time with me, a foreign newsman, he carries with him a cartridge belt of some white stuff into whose tight pockets he rams cartidges, while interpreting for me whenever necessary and generally escorting me around the camp.

p The Sandinistas have pitched their camp in thick suffocating—despite the wind—jungle, but in several sections, each two or three kilometres apart. These are green pup tents—rather for concealment from Somoza's aircraft than for protection from rain or

wind. Makeshift tables with transparent plastic tops, used mostly to clean weapons. Food stores, mostly rice, beans, and platans. That's all. A camp that can be quickly packed, and moved. Either if orders are issued for an offensive, which can be expected any moment, or in case of a bombing or a National Guard assault. The only solid structure, the only dry one at that, is the old barn, where medicines and sacks of sugar are kept.

p Though seemingly preoccupied with numerous cares, Spaghetti tells me that his brother is also fighting with the Sandinistas, only on the Northern Front, that he himself had already been in the September fighting, that then he had hoped each battle would be the last, thinking that Somoza would be smashed and that by nightfall he would be able to sip beer in a free democratic land, but that since he had 137 matured, had gained plenty of experience, that now the Sandinistas are far more experienced than in September, are far stronger, as there are far more of them, are far better armed than before, which is why he is far more certain that eventually they will win, though he realises that this can't be done in one battle, overnight.

p "Now we attack and retreat," he tells me, ramming a cartridge into a pocket of the belt, his long slim fingers white with the tension. "But one day we'll strike out so heavily," he says, his myopic eyes gleaming behind his large college glasses, "that National Guardsmen will start deserting, and then we shall win." He triumphantly rams the cartridge home.

p Spaghetti joined the Sandinistas straight from the university, where he had been majoring in medicine and had participated in a pro-Sandinista student movement. In the camp, besides everything else, he assists the doctor.

p . . . Mario is a sturdy working-class lad, who can at once force Senor Spaghetti's two stalky arms back in a trial–ofstrength game. He has been with the Sandinistas for several years now. In September he had commanded a guerilla force in Chinandega whose first operation was to attack a National Guard patrol and capture eighteen submachine guns with ammunition. Why did he join the Sandinistas? He had been by turns a house painter and tyre vulcanizer at an auto-repair shop. He had had a wife and two children. But he had always been very poor, so poor that it would sometimes make him cry. After all, he had a strong pair of hands, wanted to work, and knew how, so why was he so poor! Why wasn't he treated like a human being! In 1970 his friend, a working-class chap like himself, was arrested. Several days later a police car drove up and his friend's wife was told she could go to the mortuary to collect the body. Mario went with her. His friend's body was sadly battered. The man had obviously been clubbed and tortured. They were handed over the body with no explanations offered ("Say thanks for getting it!"). Mario decided he must get at the truth, but he was only jailed for his efforts. While in prison 138 he had first heard of the Sandinistas. Now he is with them. There is no alternative but to fight.

p . . . Edgar Moncada Colindrez is a sturdy smallish chap with soft ginger whiskers and beard, and on his head a soft plush cap of the same colour. Despite his most civilian, plushy appearance, he is your true military man. In the camp he trains the guerillas in

tactics. He is grandson of General Juan Gregorio Colindrez, a comrade of General Sandino who resisted US occupation of Nicaragua and was killed in 1934 by the father of the present Somoza, the dictator on the American payroll. There are but few descendants of General Sandino's comrades alive. All three Somozas did all to root them out, lock, stock and barrel murdering off wives, children, and grandchildren, so that not even the trace of a memory be left. In the village of Uivili, where the wives and children of General Sandino's comrades lived in one commune, Somoza's soldiers herded them together, shot them dead and burned down every single house, to the last one. Comandante Altamirano's wife, who did not live with the commune, was absent when Somoza's soldiers came. They seized her two daughters, gang-raped them, chopped off their arms, and finally killed them.

p However, the memory of Sandino lived on. Today Edgar, one of the few surviving grandchildren of Sandino's comrades, personifies the continuity.

p "We are fighting the same imperialists our fathers and grandfathers fought," he says. "The same economic system, the same dictatorship, the same dependence upon the Yankees, who treat our country today no whit different than they did in 1912 and again in 1928."

p . . . The peasant girl Rosario is 17.

p "Did your parents object?"

p "They cried, and I felt very sorry for them, but they agreed with us that no time be lost and that we fight."

p "With us?"

p "I left with my brother you see. He's now on the Northern Front."

p She is holding a brand new submachine gun without a single scratch, with an unstained barrel of blue steel, and a 139 shiny well-varnished butt. I'd never seen such a firearm before.

p "It comes from Israel," Rosario explains. "Only recently Somoza got three planefuls of them. So we captured a few and are now learning how to handle them. Everyone must know how to do that. When we start fighting again, we'll seize several hundred of them at once, and so we've got to know how to use them."

p "Do you know how?"

p "I know how to handle any firearm," she proudly returns, "even bazooka and 70-mm."

p In the camp bazookas and 70-mm's are object of special pride, even affection. (I'm using 70-mm conventionally, as in the camp it's a different number, according to the

machine-gun calibre.) No wonder. During the September uprising the lack of bazookas against tanks and 70-mm's against aircraft was particularly felt. Somoza pounded urban blocks with rockets and bombs from aircraft, and then crushed them with tanks. The Sandinistas were powerless. Now it's entirely different!

p The Sandinistas have devised a motto somewhat similar to that of "a united people are invincible", that was current in Chile in Allende's time. Only they say, "an armed people are invincible."

p I ask Rosario how she and the other girls find it in camp.

p "No different from the others," she returns with a grin. She's quite sincere, absolutely sure that what she says is right—although it's much harder here for the girls than for the men. Comandante Jose tells me later that for disrespect to a girl a guerilla is severely punished, up to expulsion from Sandinista ranks.

p "But we are as severe towards the girls too," he said.

p 'What for?" I wonder.

p "Well, supposing she sets her cap at a boy, and then makes a laughing stock of him in front of all the others. We punish that too." Jose is quite serious.

p In the afternoon, after dinner—consisting of boiled rice with black beans, griddle cake, and a greenish orange—the 140 camp takes a siesta. The crazy transistor ladio dangling from the branch amidst the submashine guns suddenly, as if by request, fills the clearing with the strains of a Strauss waltz. As if from some distant planet! Incredibly peaceful, cheerful. The guerillas listen to the Blue Danube, chins poised on submachine gun barrels.

p A girl wearing a cross on a chain round her neck lies on a stretcher, humming the tune. Her submachine gun lies by her head.

p I look at the young people seated in the clearing. There aren't many; the others are in the jungle. I have jotted down today the stories of at least twenty, each a tragedy. Murdered relatives, ruined homes, poverty. So small a land, yet so heart-wrenching this tragedy, decades long, the tragedy of a people living in their own land as if under the heel of occupation.

p After their siesta, the guerillas have classes in political education. A tall bearded comandante, with a submachine gun slung over his shoulder, paces up and down in front of a circle of seated guerillas.

p "We are not at all soldiers," he says, "and not all of us will make the army a career later. I know Jorge wants to be a schoolteacher after we win. Isn't that so, Jorge? (The young man nods.) I, too, would like to do all I can to raise the cultural level after we win.

Because it’s horrible to think that 75 percent of the Nicas can neither read nor write, and that’s now in 1978, mind you! We have a grand programme to carry out after we win. Most of you know what it’s about, but let me say once again that we must always bear in mind the goals for the sake of which we’re fighting. And so, we’re going to overthrow Somoza, disarm and disband the National Guard. Then we can nationalise all the land, all the factories, building firms, and banks that now belong to Somoza, his family, and their gang. Everything that is confiscated will be placed under public control of the people, and will be run by the employees themselves. All the confiscated land will be parceled out among the land-hungry peasants, all who want to till the land. All speculation in real estate will be banned. Clear? Any questions?”

p “Will we have justice at once?" comes a soft voice.

p “What do you actually mean?”

p “Justice,” the same voice echoes, and adds, "they killed my entire family. I want the killers to get their deserts at once, the moment we win "

p “I see,” the comandante says. "Well, that’s just how it’s going to be, we’ll have justice sure, but we can’t simply go and execute all oui enemies. We’ll tiy eveiy case on its merits. We’re not Somoza’s gang, we’re the aimy of the people.”

p “That’s all right, but I want this done as soon as possible,” comes the same quiet, but stubborn voice. "I’ve been waiting so long.”

p “Well, all I can say,” the comandante resumes, "is that there’s not so long to wait now. We’ll win, and justice will be done. We’ve got very much to do after we win, very much indeed. As one of our great revolutionaries said, ours is a small land, but it has great dreams!”

p “Air alarm!" suddenly comes a cry. "A plane from the North!”

p At once, another shout, the order, "Take cover!”

Everyone vanishes. The campfire is out and there’s not a cry, a rustle, a single movement. Only the transistor radio on the branch emits a slow, soothing tune. Not a Strauss waltz now, something else. Gradually it’s drowned out in the roar of the plane overhead.

“WE’RE ONLY BEGINNING”

p In many tents I spot the picture of a boyish-faced man wearing a Stetson, bow tie, and a civilian jacket of thick cloth with a Sam Browne belt and cartridge belt unexpectedly peeping out. This is General Augusto Cesar Sandino. The Sandinistas have many honest-to-goodness heroes, but the picture they pin up in their tents is always that of General Sandino, thus not only to stress equality (you’re hero today, I’ll be one tomorrow) but chiefly to emphasise the continuity, that today’s Sandinistas are fighting the same dictatorship and the same imperialism which Sandino and his predecessors fought.

p Though US marines might depart from Nicaragua *de jure*, occupation continued *de facto*. After Somoza’s National Guard was created and officered by graduates of West Point or men trained at US military bases in the Panama Canal Zone, there was no need for a Yankee marine presence. Enough local professional butchers, local occupationists, had been trained. Left only were American military advisers, for “consultation”, in event of a “contingency”.

p Neither the present Somoza, nor the one before him, nor the one before that, has ever acted without US advice. In Nicaragua the meetings he has almost daily with the US Ambassador are dubbed "our working parliament”. All Somozas have always repaid the help and friendship of their North American master with loyal service.

p When Somoza found himself in a predicament during the September uprising and - there was a surging worldwide 143 tide of protest against continued American economic and military aid, the dictator’s cousin urgently took himself off to the USA. I saw him speak on television. In panic the bloated-faced gentleman excitedly exhorted his audience, "How can the USA ditch us! We’re the only bulwark against communism in Central America! We helped the USA topple Guatemala’s communist President Arbens! We helped the USA smash the communist revolution in the Dominican Republic! It was from our land that you launched the Bay of Pigs invasion. How can you ditch President Somoza after all that!" An amazingly straightforward harangue from a hired killer, shouting out to his masters from the housetops about all the crimes in which both were involved.

p Somoza had no reason to funk. Washington had no intentions of ditching him. Washington officialdom provided consistent proof of its staunch sympathy for the blood-stained dictator.

p During my brief trip to Central America, four Israeli transports piled with weapons (that was the minimum identified!) landed in Managua. Only a little earlier an Israeli ship with a similar cargo put in. Weapons were supplied from Guatemala, El Salvador, and some other countries. When world information media gained wind of this, a White House spokesman shrugged the question off at a news conference with the words, "We have no influence over Israel.” In contradiction, another spokesman, now from the State

Department, threw out in justification, "We allowed Israel to supply Somoza only with *light* weapons!"

p Are any other weapons needed besides *light* weapons, to kill teenagers and children, to massacre the unarmed?

p When the September 1978 uprising was suppressed, when Somoza was bombing and strafing towns and villages that the Sandinistas had long left, simply to wreak ferocious vengeance on peaceful inhabitants for their hate, two planes appeared over Esteli. The American airman in one radioed the airman in the other to dive-bomb the hospital.

p "But it's a hospital," the second, a Nicaraguan, said.

p "Sandinistas are hiding there."

p "There are wounded people there."

p "This is an order!"

p "I can't do it!" came the reply.

p He was at once ordered back to base. A little later, another plane came over to join the first. In this day and age, it is hard to keep a thing like that secret. Someone on the ground had a radio and tape recorder with him. The communication between the two aircraft was monitored on tape, which is now in possession of the Sandinistas. It will come in handy some time in the future.

p The Sandinistas told me that quite a few of the American pilots bombing Nicaraguan cities and towns had had experience bombing cities, towns, villages, nurseries, and schools in Vietnam. This autumn no small number of SouthVietnamese instructors, former high-ranking officers of the South-Vietnamese puppet army, came to Nicaragua to pass on to the National Guard their priceless, peerless experience in waging war against one's own people.

p Some time ago, a Nicaraguan air-force plane, in which Captain Alegret, one of Nicaragua's notorious butchers, was making an inspection flight, blew up in mysterious circumstances. The explosion of a big military aircraft in such a small country as Nicaragua is no joke. In such cases the dead tell much more than the living. The dead bodies of two American and two South-Vietnamese military advisers who were aboard the plane with Alegret told many a tale.

p From Florida counter-revolutionary Cuban emigres, including several from the sadly notorious brigade involved in the 1961 Bay of Pigs landing, were sent to help Somoza. Among his mercenaries one finds Israelis, Guatemalans, Chileans, and Germans.

p Of course, among all this scum who have rushed to Tacho's salvation are some who have come of their own accord, sundry adventurers, people out of work, professional mercenaries. But one would be terribly naive if one thought this could take place without the knowledge of the Pentagon and the CIA. All the more, as Sandinistas told me, it is in the USA where one finds the recruiting, or rather induction and coordination centres, arranging for a steady flow of men and arms to Somoza. They are in Albuquerque, New

Mexico, 145

Thousands of Managuans gathered at the rally to mark the overthrow of the dictatorship

The Intercontinental Hotel is now Hotel Nicaragua Libre (Free Nicaragua)

Remains of the barricades in the streets of Managua

Tiscapa Hill The entrance to dictator Somoza's bunker Journalists in the Las Americas district of the capital

Managua's shanty town

Both are guerrillas

Isolda Machado, guerrilla fighter, is with the detachment guarding Managua Airport, now named after Augusto Sandino

A Sandmista unit at the airport, July 19, 1979

Sandinistas who took part in the street fighting m the capital

Sandmista forces enter Managua

This soldier serving in a punitive unit wanted to flee from besieged Managua in a National Guard vehicle

Miami, and San Antonio. The FSLN leadership protested to the US government, as even under US law the recruiting of mercenaries for foreign armies is forbidden in US territory. But this naturally had no effect.

p Hence, Somoza's bloated-faced relative had no reason to whip himself up into such a lather on US television. Not for a moment has the US ever ditched its allies, either now or before. Which does not mean it likes Somoza so much. He is rathei a hot potato. Too odious. The USA would prefer to replace him with someone else. Merely to preserve intact what is known in local parlance by that fluffy, indigestible word of "*Somozaism*".

p But it's not easy to make Somoza go. Not only because he resists. Somoza is more than a dictator. Somoza is a 50–year-old dynasty with a whole gang of hangers-on, an empire within a state. In a television interview an American newsman asked Somoza, "Is it true you're worth hundreds of millions of dollars?" "That's a lie! I'm not worth more than $ 100,000,000" Somoza calmly returned. "Is it true you personally own the country's only airline?" "Yes." "And the biggest shipping firm?" "Yes." "And your own seaport?" "Yes, I built it." "And you supply Mercedes trucks to Nicaragua?" "Yes." "And these trucks are for the National Guard?" "Well, not all, but most." "And you own the country's main television station?" "Yes." "And newspapers?" "Yes." "And Nicaragua's biggest hotel?" "I'm only a stockholder." "But you own the controlling packet?" "Yes." "And you own hundreds of thousands of acres of land?" "Yes." "And you own huge herds of cattle?" "Yes." "And you own banks, insurance firms, construction materials and cement factories?" "That's all true," the dictator imperturbably said, seemingly pleased to see that the TV reporter had apparently not expected such brazen-faced gall, and was beginning to lose his self-possession. Eventually, the TV man heatedly asked, "So what do you think when . . . whenever you see beggars in your country, where you . . . where you own everything?" Somoza looked at the American with his 146 vacuous cow-like eyes, and said, "I only think I ought to get still richer." The American was completely taken aback. "I don't understand," he said. "It's all very simple," the dictator explained. "The richer I am, the better my people live. The more business I do, the more jobs there

are. And so on.” At this point, the interview broke off. I think the television correspondent, an old hand accustomed to surprises, who had seen all manner of men, had simply lost the power of speech.

p For the USA to oust that kind of Somoza is hazardous, especially considering the possible consequences of *destabilisation*. On the other hand, to keep Somoza going in a land that hates him, in a land where the Sandinistas are so tremendously popular, are a political, let alone military, force, also spells the threat of destabilisation. And destabilisation today is the worst pitfall for US policy vis-a-vis Latin America.

p The Pentagon, the CIA, the State Department, the big American banks, including Chase Manhattan, which has the greatest investment in Nicaragua, and sundry US companies have computers working overtime to figure out which of the threats is worse.

p Throughout all of US interference in Nicaraguan affairs, the so-called "Mediation Commission" has possibly played the worst hypocritical role. In September 1978 a nationwide strike in Nicaragua was followed by an armed uprising, in the process of which Sandinistas captured four big cities. Only lack of arms prevented capitalising on this initial success. They had to pass to a defensive when Somoza, from his bunker across the road from Hotel Intercontinental in Managua, dispatched aircraft and armour against a people armed with sticks and stones and Sandinistas armed with rifles and submachine guns. They could hit back against National Guardsmen but were powerless in the face of aircraft and armour. A fearful bloodbath was in the offing.

p At this moment mediation should have come, but the Americans preferred to play a waiting game, to give Somoza time to recover from the first blows, gather strength, and unleash carnage. Between five to ten thousand people were 147 killed, gunned down, burned alive with napalm, or crushed under tanktreads. Thousands more were jailed. The Sandinistas had to call a retreat. Young people fled from town and village, rallied to their banners.

p Only after Somoza completed the massacre did the Americans set up a body for “mediation”, to "bring the warring sides to the negotiating table”. They called on Guatemala and the Dominican Republic for assistance. “Mediating” between Somoza and his supporters, the US body raised with facile ease the dictator’s own invention to "go to the country”. Now “moving” after Somoza had drowned the country in blood with American help, and mounted genocide against his own countrymen to "reach them a lesson”, after he had reduced cities and villages to ruin and rubble, and was continuing with torture and executions, after he had doubled National Guard strength by recruiting underworld criminals and foreign mercenaries.

p In a land where torture and detention are rife, where three-quarters of the population can neither read nor write, where free elections are unknown and there is no electoral machinery, indeed where any vote would be rigged by Somoza, to speak of "going to the country" is a nightmarish travesty mocking the very meaning of *human rights*.

p But this is exactly what Somoza agreed to with the USA for which “mediation” was merely one more vehicle for intervention. Moreover, on the most advantageous terms for himself, and of course, for the Americans. Even if a plebiscite were to go against Somoza, implying inability for some reason to rig results, Tacho wouldn’t leave, but simply turn over the Presidency to another fellow from his own (“Liberal”) Party and consequently go on ruling through this front, through his own cabinet and own National Guard.

p *No change!*

p Of course, the dictator had to pay, but this was a mere trifle. All he had to do was to stop gagging the radio, which he, incidentally owns, to lift the curfew, which meant killing could go on without that, to amnesty political prisoners, whom it would be even easier to gun down after their release. No wonder that when the US newsman I mentioned asked 148 Somoza whether he would really go, the dictator retorted, "I haven’t the slightest intentions of going!”

p In an interview, Daniel Ortega, an FSLN leader, presented his view of the trend that developments could take in Nicaragua. "We, of course, realise,” he said, "that a plebiscite is only one of the things the imperialists have up their sleeve. Quite likely they have several other ’solutions’ for the Nicaraguan crisis, which they find so dangerous. A coup is not ruled out. This may be scripted as follows: the National Guard will overthrow Somoza and install its own man, as much of a dastardly butcher as Somoza, as President; or Somoza may himself stage a palace revolution to consolidate his position; or finally, one of his bosom cronies will stage a spurious coup; or something else like that. Their sole purpose is to thwart democratisation and keep the Somoza regime going at all costs, with or without Tacho. Naturally, the Americans have several formulas pat to stretch a helping hand out to the man offering the most advantageous option. Should nothing work, the imperialists may stoop to outright armed intervention. I am taking advantage of this interview to let everyone know, to tell the whole world, that there is the very real danger of imperialist armed intervention in Nicaragua. As for us, for our people, our only option is to go on fighting.”

At the camp, a Sandinista guerilla, describing the September fighting, commented, "That’s only the beginning.”

* * *

“WE’RE STRONGER!”

p The plane flies by at some distance from the Sandinista camp, so low that the airman could not possibly spot the clearing. Even if he had, he will have seen nothing there, as the Sandinistas are fine camouflage experts. They have to be, to keep going. The moment the roar of the aircraft dies away in the distance, again the bonfire is lit—with no smoke, mind you—and again the guerillas huddle beneath the tree to proceed with their political education classes. The bearded comandante—he is huge, at least two metres tall—pads to and fro within the circle, with a soft, springy step, much like a caged tiger talking quietly all the while. Now and again he stops to heed a question, his beard sprawling over his chest as he doodles on the ground with the tip of his army boot. The submachine gun slung over his shoulder obviously gets in his way, but orders are orders, and in my head then go with a tilt, much like a piece of poetry, "Keep your gun by your side, keep you gun by your side”. I can’t hear what he is saying, except at the end, when apparently summing up part of his talk, he asks, "So what is our first and immediate task?" At once several voices loudly chorus, "To kick out Somoza!" The gangling comandante grins, lifting his face up to the sun. His smile is surprisingly childlike, radiant, defensive.

p “Let’s all give a shout so that the bastard hear it in his bunker!" he suggests.

p “Down with Somoza!" the guerillas roar, raising their submachine guns over their heads. "Down with Somoza!”

p In the intermission the bewhiskered middle-aged cook yells, "Coffee break!" A small queue lines up.

p “Ten jumps on your hunkers,” the cook tells the first in line. Guffawing, the guerilla obeys, and though his boisterous laughter causes him to trip now and again, it is one more way of keeping fit.

p “Here’s your coffee.” Then to the next, "Ten push-ups!”

p Spaghetti tumbles flat on the ground. He is certainly no muscular type, and when you’re laughing fit to burst and are in tiptop spirits, that’s no easy thing to do. His glasses fall off as he plays the giddy-goat, and guffaws with the other guerillas. Pretending to be angry, the bewhiskered cook shouts, "Another five push-ups!" When Spaghetti is through at last, he pours into the stretched out mug a portion of very strong, very sweet, and very black coffee.

p I find it hard to believe it is these guffawing youngsters who that very day told me such nightmarish stories of all they had gone through.

p Indeed, only an hour ago one guerilla, sipping coffee from his tin mug with such pleasure, told me how before his eyes Somoza's National Guardsmen had razed his native town. "Those bastards set fire to it when not a single Sandinista guerilla was left. On the 19th or 20th of September it was, after the Sandinistas had held the city for almost a fortnight. Clear that there were not enough provisions left, they decided to call an orderly retreat into the mountains. I wasn't with them then, and stayed on. Only twelve hours after the Sandinista rearguard left, did the National Guard enter. However before doing that, they called in aircraft to bomb the city. Then Sherman tanks rolled in, firing their cannons at practically every house. Infantry coming on behind tossed hand grenades into windows, burst into houses firing submachine guns from the hip, fanning out the shots. They didn't care who they hit, children or old people. That's how most were killed. The International Red Cross collected all who could move into the building of the Santa Rosary College, some two and a half thousand of us. I was among them. We were warned not to go out of doors, as Somoza Guardsmen were hunting down all teenagers, even if they had 151 just turned ten, were gunning them downright in the street, pouring petrol over the dead bodies, and setting fire to them. They burned to death those who were still breathing, were still moving. I managed to get away, and now I'm here."

p The transistor radio swinging from the branch above the kitchen broadcasts news from Managua, but the worst news seems to creep in of its own accord, and it is not the kind of news the transistor radio presents.

p Somewhat earlier, a schoolmistress wounded in the leg during the September events was discharged from an Esteli hospital. As her home had been destroyed, the Red Cross decided to move her to another place, where a school was still standing, for her to teach there. National Guardsmen stopped the Red Cross ambulance, dragged the woman out, and took her away. The next day her dead body was found by the roadside not far from the city. . . .

p In Leon National Guardsmen forced a group of women to "demonstrate" and carry placards that said, "The Communists kill our children!" and "The Communists burn down our homes!" Several newsmen and press photographers were invited to watch this "demonstration". One decent newsman came up to one of the women, and said, "Why are you carrying these placards? After all, both you and I know that it's Somoza who's killing children and destroying your homes." "They made us do it," the woman said, breaking down. The newsman tore the placard out of her hand and tossed it on to the ground. National Guardsmen fell upon him, beat him up, and took him away. They also beat up the woman, but Jeft her behind. The Sandinista camp gained wind of that in a roundabout way only recently. They are now trying to find out who the newsman was. . . .

p Alvara Sanchez's oldest son was arrested a month ago. At six o'clock in the morning National Guardsmen burst into her home on Managua's outskirts, and took away her boy (he had still not turned 18). He was blind-folded, his hands were lashed behind his back, and he was shoved into a van and taken away. Note that the boy had never been a 152 Sandinista. Some time later she heard over the radio that National Guardsmen had found

a dead “guerilla” outside Leon. He was described as wearing army jacket and breeches, and as having in his pocket a red-and-black bandana to cover up his face. The next day a Leon acquaintance who had come to Managua called on Alvara and told her she had seen the dead “guerilla”, who was really Alvara’s son. He had been murdered in prison and the ’“guerilla” story had been put out merely to throw a scaie. It had not been thought someone in Leon would be able to identify the young man.

p This is one of Somoza’s latest inventions. The butchers murder people in one place and show their dead bodies elsewhere, claiming that they were communist agents and guerillas. At night National Guardsmen fire into the air to make pretences of an ambush or exchange of gunfire. Then they burst into homes "to ferret out bandits”, and in the process rob, arrest, and kill. . . .

p On 2 November four young men and two girls were driving towards Managua. At half past six in the evening, they had to stop on the outskirts, because the engine broke down. Knowing that they still had an hour and a half to the eight o’clock curfew, they started tinkering with the engine. At that moment a National Guard patrol drove up, and without further ado, shot and killed one of the young men. They ordered another boy to drag the dead body into the bushes, and when he refused, shot and killed him along with the other two young men. After a huddle, they killed one of the girls, who was thirteen or fourteen at most, and took the older girl, who was sixteen, away with them. On the next day, her dead body was found by the roadside. She had been gang-raped and stabbed in the back. The story was related by the sole survivor, a thirteen-year-old boy, who when wounded had played possum. . . .

p This is all happening today. Statistics for the number murdered may already be compiled. Since the September events, Somoza’s butchers have been killing fifteen to twenty people a day in prisons alone. However, these statistics are based only on the number of dead bodies found in the most unexpected places, by a roadside, in a ditch, or in the street 153 of some small town. The bodies carry the traces of torture, with yanked-out nails, mutilated faces, and slit throats. However, it is anyone’s guess as to how many more have been killed, and not found, who have been “cremated” or buried in prison yards.

p When such news comes, there is no more laughter in the clearing, no more [horseplay. Spaghetti proceeds with still greater frenzy with his task, which it seems to me he will never complete, that of ramming cartridges into the cartridge belt. "Never mind,” he says, and I can’t really understand whom he is trying to soothe, himself or me. "We’ll make them pay for everything, down to the last nail. Put it all down, please!”

p I jot down every detail. I still remember the sessions of the International Commission of Inquiry into the crimes of the Chilean military junta and know that at some time in the future all these details will be needed, for sure.

p The year of the vigorous FSLN offensive action has already yielded its crop of heroes, whose pictures have every right to be pinned up in camp tents alongside that of General

Sandino. When I tell Nora Astorga that, she laughs, thinking I'm kidding. Though Nora is dainty, fragile, the very epitome of femininity, she holds her submachine gun with the same nonchalant ease as she swung her handbag prior to March 1978, and her uniform is as becoming as the fashionable frocks lawyer Nora Astorga could afford before 8 March 1978.

p However, before telling you what happened on 8 March, I feel I must start with what occurred ten years ago, when Nora yet an undergraduate at the Catholic University, joined the Sandinistas. Upon graduation, she took up a law practice, and nobody had the slightest inkling that this merry, attractive, capable girl-lawyer was an agent and go-between for the FSLN. She did not take part in its raids, but served as a channel, at times the only channel to promptly pass on highly important information and other things. She was a very successful legal adviser at one of Managua's biggest 154 building firms, indeed was doing so well that her company won the contract to build a house (for General Renaldo Perez Vega, a bosom crony of the dictator, who was Chief of Staff of the National Guard, head of the secret police, and a trusted CIA agent. Somoza's second-in-command. The dictator relied heavily on this 56-year-old general, who ordered hangings, commanded punitive expeditions, and stage–managed political assassinations, such as of the opposition leader and progressive journalist Chamorro. Whenever Nicaraguans mentioned Somoza's murderous regime, they often focussed hate on General Perez, whose arms were stained up to the elbows with the blood of countless victims.

p The first time Nora met the general was in Somoza's notorious bunker in Bolivar Street, across the road from the massive Hotel Intercontinental. The general had an office in that bunker, and Nora had called to discuss the terms of the contract. Several more meetings were held to discuss business, and soon the general intimated that he would not be averse to dating Nora somewhere else. She told her Sandinista friends about this, and they decided that she get the general to visit a set place which Nora would indicate, but without bodyguard.

p This was a perilous assignment, as the general was clever, could sniff danger a mile away, while his profession caused him to treat everyone with suspicion. Then his network of agents might shadow Nora. At any rate, Nora told the general that he would not get anywhere with her until she said so, that she had to finalise divorce proceedings with her ex-husband. The general knew this was true, and discarding suspicions, agreed to wait. Finally, in February, Nora told the FSLN that the fish was on the hook.

p The operation was set for 8 March. The plan was to kidnap the general and notify Somoza that he would be spared only if the latter released political prisoners. However, it did not pan out that way.

p In the morning, Nora telephoned the general at the bunker. She was told that the day before he had flown North (to command a punitive operation against the Sandinistas). She asked that he be told that she had called. In but half 155 an hour, he called her back and Nora told him that if he wanted to see her, he could come that night—she had packed her two girls off to relatives outvin the country—as another time would be out of the

question. The general said he would fly back to. Managua by chopper. "Only please come without a bodyguard," Nora warned, "I have to think of my reputation."

p When he arrived that evening at the hour stated, Nora led him into her room, where she had concealed two armed guerillas in a closet. A third guerilla was hiding next door. The first thing she did was to pull the general's pistol out of its holster, and put it aside—not too far, to arouse no suspicions. He was absolutely sure of himself. Generally, he was no coward, and was quite certain that he had nothing to worry about. His chauffeured car was parked outside. As the general methodically undressed, Nora, believing the time ripe, gave the signal. At first, when the guerillas fell upon him, he thought they had both been ambushed, but when he saw Nora holding a revolver, he exclaimed, "And this is what I was waiting two years for!" Then he yelled for help. A muscular athletic person, it was no easy matter to truss him up, and it was still harder to gag him. Three times they stuck the gag into his mouth, and each time he continued to call to his chauffeur. Only after he was drugged did he subside.

p Wondering if the driver had heard the general's shouts, Nora went out to see the man walking up and down by the car, and glance from time to time up at the window. She came up and said as calmly as she could, "The general wants rum, but I've only got scotch." Without a word, the chauffeur got into the car and drove away. She ran back [into the house, to tell the guerillas that the coast was clear, and then rushed out again to get her car, which had been parked a couple of blocks away. Several minutes later, she drove into her garage, and strode into the house through the connecting side door. As the guerillas got into the car, Nora asked where the general was.

p "Let's get going," the commander said. "We had to carry out the sentence. We cannot let you run any risks."

p Later, Nora learned that when she told the guerillas that the general's chauffeur had gone, they had thought he had gone for help. They had been ordered that in such a case, they must kill the hangman, so that Nora run no risk. They did that.

p About an hour later, they reached the Northern highlands. One hour after that, a Sandinista phoned the National Guard headquarters to say that acting in the name of the people, the FSLN had executed one of Nicaragua's chief butchers, whose body would be found at such and such a place. He was not believed, and nothing was done till the next morning, when the general's chauffeur phoned to say he had spent the entire night waiting for his chief outside Nora's house. Only then was a detail sent. Somoza was furious. This had really cut to the bone.

p Several months afterwards Nora was transferred to the Southern Front and in September, as ja member of Penas Blanco's unit, she took part in the fighting against the National Guard as an ordinary rank-and-file guerilla, although the entire country knew of her heroic deed from an underground Radio Sandino broadcast.

p When I asked her whether the 8 March, which is International Women's Day, was a chance coincidence, or not, she chuckled. "It was," she said, "but I'm happy that it worked out like that. And I'd like to tell your people through you that the solidarity of the world's women will also help us to defeat Somoza. You can also tell them that my two little girls and my mother are safe and sound and are now outside of Nicaragua. Of course, I'd very much like to see them, but when duty calls. . . ."

p Several days before I visited the Sandinista camp, a Latin American cameraman acquaintance ran off for me sequences of an astoundingly emotion-packed interview he had had with a Nicaraguan woman refugee, the mother of three children. I saw the calm, regal face of a silver-haired lady holding back her tears as she told the story of her boys, two of whom are no longer alive. The middle son was killed by 157 National Guardsmen at the end of the year before last, the youngest quite recently, in mid-October. Only in November did she get the letter he had written shortly before he died. I saw her take out the sheet of paper and without looking at it—she had learned it by heart—read it. "I'm longing to see you, Mother, but can't come. You know why. That's most bitter, not to be at your birthday. I often think of what you mean to us, your grown-up boys, and always say that you mean everything, everything the most wonderful Mother in the world could mean to her children. You are our very heart. We have known you stern, and have known you tender, but always with love, always ready to sacrifice yourself for us, and never asking anything in exchange, never. All three of us think that of you. Eriberto thinks that, and so did our dear dead Enrique. Better times will come, and we'll celebrate your next birthday together. Enrique'll also be with us, because he never left us, he's only gone for a time." She said these words with difficulty, and her chin quivered. However, she regained her self-possession, and after a few moments suddenly seemed to recollect something. She unfolded the letter and carefully picked up the dry petals of a scarlet flower. Showing it to the camera, she said, "He always sent me a red carnation for my birthday. And this time too, even though he's dead."

p She looked straight into the camera's eye and said firmly and distinctly, "I hope people in Nicaragua will see this. I want to tell the mothers in my country that though two of my boys have died tragic (deaths, I am proud to have a third fighting against Somoza. And if, God forbid," her voice trembled, "my Eriberto. . .," she could not say it, the horrible word, "I will take up his rifle and go off to fight with them." Yes, that was what she said, "with them". It was so natural, as a mother always thinks her sons alive.

p At the Sandinista camp several days later I told my new friends about this lady, this wonderful mother of such wonderful sons. This was in the store-room where were Comandante Jose and another five or six guerillas. As I finished, one of them jumped up, grabbed his submachine gun and stalked out. I could feel the tension in the air. The other 158 guerillas also said nothing for a while. Then one broke the silence to explain, "He knows her. He's Eriberto, she's his mother."

p I left the camp late at night. Spaghetti went off somewhere and brought back as souvenir the Sandinista red–andblack bandana, which is usually tied around the neck, or covers the face up to the nose on missions.

p A young guerilla, no more than a boy, solemnly announced clasping his heavy submachine gun:

p “Now you’re a Sandinista!" "That’s so,” I said.

p “Look here, come with us,” the boy suddenly suggested. "Where to?”

p “We’re soon going to set out. In another couple of days. Mark my words. We’ll start swiping at Somoza again! So come with us!”

p “I can’t,” I said.

p “Why!" His surprise was sincere.

p “I mustn’t.”

p “Of course,” he said, disappointedly, "one’s got to be game.”

p “Can’t you see he’s a *foreign* newsman?" Spaghetti intervened, "a *foreigner!*"

p “So what,” the boy was obstinate. "That’s good! International solidarity!”

p He came up quite close and heatedly argued, "Lookit, this time we’ll soon get rid of him. You’ve seen what arms we have now. The moment they hear the name of Sandino, they’ll run like rats! This time it’ll take us four days, five the most! You just see! You’ve seen that we’ve got 70-mms against aircraft and bazookas against tanks now. We only look weaker, actually we’re stronger.”

p He poured this all out in a low voice as if confiding something he held nearest to heart. "That’s because the people are with us,” he said. "They’re not with Somoza. They’ll tell us where to go, they’ll give us food and water, and they’ll hide us if it comes to that. You’ll see, we’ll need only four days, no more, this time!”

p How very much I wanted to feel as sure as he was. How very much I didn’t want to think that soon many of these wonderful people might no longer be alive. Would it be one out of three? Or, forbid, one out of two? Will you, my dear little desperado, still be alive? And you, my dear bumbling Senor Spaghetti? And you, Comandante Jose?

p We all want you so very much to go on living! To win, and to go on living!

p It’ll all soon be over. You say so. That’s fine. You are the wonderful sons and daughters of your country, and for you it will be a land of happiness.

p “We only look weaker, actually we’re stronger.” How very true! For that matter, what revolution, tell me, ever started out by having the edge?

p We left late that night. Again I saw in front of me only the light-toned hands of the man pointing out the way. Only several kilometres later did I find, as I harkened to my own footsteps, that I had now learned to walk without making a sound....

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